The Complexity of Royalty:

An Exploration into Gender Transgressions and Sexual Deviancy in the Reign of Edward II and the Link Between Gender and Sexuality in Medieval Society.

Edward II receiving the English crown.

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DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s). Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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STATEMENT 2

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for deposit in the University's digital repository.

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Abstract:

Current historical research regarding both gender and sexuality has been notably biased and lacking. Appropriate research is currently absent regarding both the nature of transgressive individuals, those not acting in accordance with their assigned gender roles, as well as those engaging in sodomitical or 'unnatural' sexual and romantic relationships. Many early historians preferred a gendered approach and limited exploration of such topics to perspectives contemporary to the historian, not the historical individuals concerned. Ovesey implores that 'the concept of homosexuality proposed by Sigmund Freud remains relatively unchanged' [1]. It is this subject that is discussed in this research piece, aiming to begin an exploration into the links between sexuality and gender while maintaining a high level of study into gender transgressions.

This topic is large and complex, therefore the inclusion of a singular point in history of which to apply the findings of this research to is a useful tool implemented throughout this research. This study will use the reign of Edward II of England as its point of exploration; this decision was made due to the interesting development of gender and sexuality and the recordings of such transgressions throughout the Plantagenet dynasty. I therefore will be seeking to better understand the nature of transgressive behaviour in the reign of Edward II.

This research follows its aim to explore the transgressions of Edward II and those closest to him regarding sexuality and gender. The findings of this exploration evaluate the complexity of such topics thus leading to a discussion of severity of transgressions as well as the subject of differing rules for certain individuals. An interesting anecdote of this research is the

[1] L. Ovesey, *Homosexuality and Pseudohomosexuality* (New York: Science House, 1969), p.15.

severity of which the monarchy is chastised for its transgressions and the double standard of the treatment of male transgressions versus female.

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A specific thank you to Dr Bronach Kane for her constructive criticism and notes in the revision of this work, the chance to further my research into this topic and produce a piece of work that I am undoubtedly proud of is appreciated and I am grateful for the opportunity to revise this dissertation to a standard which I am pleased to present.

I would like to also acknowledge and thank the unwavering support of my parents – Mr and Mrs A. Collins, without whom this would not have been possible. There were moments I thought this dissertation would never fully exist, but they have kept me always focused on the path ahead, in complete faith of my ability to complete this research.

Finally, a special shoutout to Pearle Morha who has kept me sane with a steady coffee supply and a shoulder to cry on when it all got too much.

Important Figures:

Edward II King Edward II of England, son of Edward I and father to Edward III. Also known as Edward of Caernarfon who reigned from 1307 until he was deposed in 1327.

Isabella of France Isabella of France was the wife of Edward II. Queen of England between 1307 and 1327 while her husband held the English throne and regent of England from 1327 until 1330 on behalf of Edward III. A French Princess, the daughter of Philip IV of France.

Hugh Despenser Hugh Despenser the Younger, 1st Baron le Despenser. Heir of Hugh Despenser, Earl of Winchester. Royal chamberlain and favourite of Edward II.

Piers Gaveston Piers Gaveston, 1st Earl of Cornwall. A nobleman of Gascon origin and favourite of Edward II.

Roger Mortimer Roger Mortimer, 3rd Baron Mortimer of Wigmore, 1st Earl of March and former Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. Mortimer may have been the lover of Isabella of France, aiding her in the deposing of Edward II.

Introduction (with Aims and Methodology).

Gender transgressions and sexually deviant behaviour are mentioned frequently in the chronicles of medieval figures, always within the negative connotation of transgressive behaviour equating to deficiency in gender. The link between sexual transgressions and the concept of gender is intriguing due to the overlapping connotations the two subjects hold, however the extent of this is debatable. This research will focus on the discussion of gender and sexual transgressions in the reign of Edward II, evaluating the links between and the severity and effect that transgressions have on the royal court at this time.

This discussion limits itself to the subject of gender and sexuality within the royal milieux in order to gain specified knowledge on the royal ideologies of gender. The opinions of royalty on matters of personal exploration and expression are often incompatible with the viewpoints of the 'ordinary' people of the same time, this is often due to the luxury of their ability to articulate the divergence of political, social, and religious ideas.[2] The ideologies of the royal milieux are also significant for the exploration of the medieval period due to the nature of royalty as an ideal to strive towards, even in modern society royalty is deemed the unobtainable ideal for the ordinary person, a standard for others to endeavour to obtain, thus the royal standpoint portrays the blueprint for medieval society.[3]

The study of gender throughout the medieval period has often been hindered by the binary which has been applied to the subject, a binary which has been a prominent part of society for many centuries now and only in the last few decades has faced modernisation. Gender binary is the social model which places masculinity and femininity on opposing ends of gender classification, with the outcome that these are the only gender identities which exist in

[2] J. Dumolyn et al., 'The Voices of the People in Late Medieval Europe', *Communication and Popular Politics* (Paris: Centre d'Etudes Medievales de Montpellier, 2021), p.1.
[3] *ibid.*

society.[4] The binary model therefore enforces conformity and consistency in gender identity, encouraging the study of masculinity in direct comparison to femininity as forces of opposition; the singular entity male is therefore principally conceived in relation to the female variant.[5] The binary imposed here is inherently aligned with one's gamete-based sex, as assigned by medical professionals at birth and does not allow for transgressions from the sex appointed via gender expression. An example of this: a child is born with male genitalia thus assigned the male sex at birth, the binary model therefore depicts the child as the male gender, assuming that the child will then follow the stereotypical blueprint for masculinity, including being masculine in physical appearance and clothing preference, follow societal rules for males such as expected job roles, in addition to exhibiting male traits, characteristics and behaviours. The gender binary also defaults each gender into heterosexual attraction to the opposing sex, in this example the female sex, depicting any deviation from this as a direct transgression to one's gender.

As a heteronormative society, the gender binary exists in the modern person's everyday life despite the ever-growing presence of the LGBTQ+ community, whose existence opposes this binary. As an illustration of this, consider most public restrooms in the UK. Public restrooms not only consist typically of only two spaces: the male and the female bathrooms, but also typically depict which of these two genders are allowed into the space with symbols - an ordinary humanised cartoon for the male restroom, and a version with a skirt or dress for the women. This example is one small insight into the binary which exists everywhere in modern society and the bias and attitude towards gender variance that this normalises in our world. Though these may only seem like convenient symbols to prohibit men in the ladies' room and vice versa, it in fact displays two attitudes which oppose the very existence of many

[4] M. Uebel, 'Reviewed Work: Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages by C. A. Lees et al.', *Arthuriana* (New York: Scriptorium Press, 1995), p.110.
[5] *ibid.*

individuals. First, it exhibits an attitude of non-acceptance to those who do not conform. Which restroom are you to use when you identify as neither cisgender man nor woman? Whether this be a biological reasoning such as being born intersex, or a product of gender identity such as a non-binary or transgender individuals. Second, it perpetrates a stereotype of gender, implying default or mandatory characteristics of your biological sex. If you are of female sex, are you transgressing by entering the woman's toilets and not wearing a skirt doing so?

Scholarship on the topic of gender and sexuality, therefore, is often conducted with this bias in mind, seemingly inevitable due to its inescapable nature. However, this bias can often hinder a scholar's ability to appropriately study gender and sexuality in history and the importance of evaluating history from the perspective of the historical figures can often be forgotten. The medieval period is a significant portion of history, often thought to be containing ten centuries within it and even when subdividing this period into smaller sections; the Early, High and Late Middle Ages for example, there is still a considerable amount of growth and development of ideas and social thought to transpire within each timeframe, which makes it problematic to impose later ideologies such as gender binaries onto a period of time with such significant social development.

The Middle Ages can be viewed as a transitional period for gender as it falls between ancient ideologies and more developed theories that came later in history, bought on by the significant female rulers of this time; Elizabeth I and Anne of Great Britain, which implores for the importance of the female gender to be explored as we see prominent women in roles historically made for the male sex.[6] The implication of a binary however contradicts the presence of kingly women, as well as forgets the origins of masculinity and femininity in

[6] E. Robertson, 'Medieval Feminism in Middle English Studies: A Retrospective', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* (Tulsa: University of Tulsa, 2007), p.73.

ancient history. Returning to the example of restroom doors, the overwhelming implication here is the link between gender and clothing, significantly women and skirts. Some may argue that the implication of these symbols is not that all women must always wear skirts and you must wear a skirt to be female, but to recognise the skirt as a feminine article of clothing. However, the consequence of this rationalisation is the point of view that *all* men do *not* wear skirts, suggesting a man in a skirt is transgressing against their gender by wearing a feminine article of clothing. If we rigidly apply this binary way of thinking to history the two are incompatible. Uebel writes that 'masculinity [is] a construct of heroic culture',[7] thus applying the origins of masculinity in the ancient traditions of heroism and ancient warriors as the peak, or 'blueprint', for the male gender. It is these ancient warriors, however, who traditionally wore skirts and dresses. In Ancient Greece and Rome the Chiton, a form of tunic or dress fastened at the shoulder, was worn by both men and women, a gender-neutral garment which resembles a modern dress.[8]

A later example is the Fustanella, a pleated skirt traditionally worn by male Byzantine warriors, as well as many other warrior nations of the time.[9] Of course, when studying the Middle Ages the male sex wearing a skirt centuries earlier is no more significant than the male sex not wearing a skirt centuries later, therefore neither can be deemed as the default and neither bias applied to this time period. Instead, this implores an exploration into the specific opinions of the society of the Middle Ages in order to gain a higher understanding of what is and is not a transgressive act in regard principally to gender role and secondarily to sexual orientation in the studied time period without implying modern bias.

[7] Uebel, 'Reviewed Work: Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages by C. A. Lees et al.' *Arthuriana*, p.110.
[8] N. Wilson, *Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece*, Psychology Press (New York: Routledge, 2006), p.245.
[9] C. H. Morgan. *Corinth: The Byzantine Pottery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1942), pp.132-133.

If one is expected to not hold the individuals of the Middle Ages to the standard of civilisations such as the Ancient Greeks and Byzantine Empire, then it is in the same respect that the standards of a more modern concept should not be standardised either. From this perspective, therefore, it is more valuable to study gender and sexuality in the Middle Ages with neither bias in mind and evaluate the opinions of medieval society as a product of their own making. Locking gender into a binarism impairs the ability to analyse the larger consequences of gender in history,[10] and evaluate the genuine effects that gender difference, gender expression and sexual preference has on the historical society being evaluated.

Considering this, an effective method of gender and sexuality study which does not force binarism on expression is therefore required. This is, in theory, an easy fix – simply do not apply such binarism; however it is then critical to apply knowledge of the considered time periods' own views on gender and sexuality to the study instead, which is considerably more challenging. This research aims to bridge a gap within the topic of gender and sexuality in the medieval period and remove the stigma and stereotyping from transgressive behaviour, while maintaining research which both appreciates and evaluates the mandatory nature of the gender binary. The gender bias is important due to its presence in historical study in this field, therefore finding a balance between respecting and using the binary verses disregarding it and evaluating situations for themselves will be required. To achieve an appropriate exploration into gender and sexual transgressions, the nature of each supposed affliction must be evaluated in reference to the viewpoints of those contemporary to the source, as well as suitable lexis being maintained throughout while expressing the importance of both ancient and modern perspectives as a comparison.

[10] Uebel, 'Reviewed Work: Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages by C. A. Lees et al.' *Arthuriana,* p.111.

Firstly, establishing the meaning of the term 'transgressive' is vital for studying this topic. The verb 'transgress' is defined as to break a law or moral rule with synonyms such as 'offend' and 'sin',[11] the concept here of a 'law' or 'moral rule' implies in the context of gender and sexuality the standardised social norm which one is expected to conform to, thus implying the existence of a standard by which one can transgress.[12] In a modern context this would be the gender binary, however as previously established this norm cannot be held accountable to the actions of a medieval society as it was created after the fact, therefore we do not yet have a standardised default in order to evaluate whether an individual is transgressing against this or not. However, with a lack of suitable alternatives, the term 'transgressive' must be the most appropriate term. It is important therefore to identify acts that previous scholars have deemed as transgressive behaviours and evaluate the attitudes of the period, thus concluding whether their contemporaries would have labelled the act as transgressive, or whether it is the modernised man who deems it so. This methodology is the formula, therefore, that this discussion will use to hopefully achieve an unbiased discussion on the topic of gender and sexual transgressions.

Smith discusses the ability to evaluate gender through experiences that you have not got first-hand understanding of. Smith is one of the originators of the standpoint theory, a concept which proactively combines neo-Marxist, ethnomethodological and phenomenological concepts,[13] which many have deemed as a subsection of gender theory.[14] This theory emphasises that one's knowledge is affected by one's position in society and therefore we experience the world in the conditions which we are born into.[15] Smith's argument with this

[11] K. A. Locke, 'The Bible on Homosexuality: Exploring Its Meaning and Authority', *Journal of Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Taylor and Francis, 2005), p.2.
[12] *ibid.*
[13] S. Ahmed et al., *Feminist Theory* (New York: Sage Publishing, 1992), p.316.
[14] *ibid.*
[15] *ibid.*, .319.

notion is not that we cannot look outside of our own experiences for our standpoint, but rather that we must recognise that we will be unable to have completely objective knowledge of a subject born from another's standpoint. Therefore, we must use our societal views as an entryway into a topic to find a formula for investigation into a subject from the originator's standpoint.[16]

The standpoint theory, therefore, will be invaluable to this discussion of gender and sexuality in the medieval period as this conversation aims to evaluate existing research which projects the opinions and society of the author, rather than the subject matter, and instigate an evolution into discussing the subject matter from the standpoint of the original society.

It is important to remember throughout this topic that the transgressive acts being discussed are merely deemed to be such by our modern standards and the principles set by previous scholars of the past century. The ongoing discussion in this dissertation will therefore focus on not only highlighting the actions and characteristics which are deemed as transgressive, but also evaluate how potentially unordinary they were in the medieval perspective, aiming to conclude whether the individuals carrying out these transgressions were truly the social outcast and anomaly they are often portrayed as.

As previously discussed, the medieval period encompasses a large timeframe, often seen as everchanging and developing. Consequently, it would require an equally significant investigation to adequately investigate the gender and sexual transgressions displayed throughout the period. Rather than conduct an exploration throughout the medieval period, rarely inspecting the specifics, this dissertation will discuss a more focused period of the Middle Ages to provide the attention this topic requires. Though there are many significant and well-known cases of transgressive rulers in the English monarchy, the example chosen

[16] *ibid.*

for this topic is the rule of Edward II of England. Edward II's rule is riddled with seemingly transgressive individuals and acts which will make the perfect case study for this topic. Additionally, Edward II falls into the Plantagenet Dynasty, a significant section of England's history. The inclusion of other Plantagenet monarchs will allow for appropriate comparison while still taking the social development of England in this period into account.

The inclusion of ancient comparisons is vital to this discussion due to the evolving nature of gender and sexuality studies. Historians frequently evaluate the influence that the ancient had over the medieval, with Karras discussing the links between the Medieval perspective and the teachings of ancient philosophers[17] and Uebel examining the ancient heroic culture which influences the medieval views of masculinity.[18] Evaluating and discussing ancient literature, philosophy and attitudes towards the subject of gender and sexuality will therefore be as significant and important to this dissertation as the comparisons drawn between Edward II's reign and the reigns of other Plantagenet rulers.

Similarly, a comparison will be drawn between the nature and actions of historical figures and the pinnacle extremity of transgressions in the Middle Ages, for example: witchcraft. Witchcraft was viewed as an arbitrary usage of female whim and the actions of a transgressive female,[19] thus it is significant while discussing the transgressive actions of medieval women. This discussion aims to identify the transgressions that held significance in the entire medieval period, while evaluating them in the reign of Edward II, therefore the inclusion of transgressive behaviours not found in Edward's reign are also of importance to this argument as a discussion on why they are not found can ensue.

[17] Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe,* p.5.
[18] Uebel, 'Reviewed Work: Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages by C. A. Lees et al.' *Arthuriana,* p.110.
[19] O. Davies, *The Oxford Illustrated History of Witchcraft and Magic* (London: Oxford University Press, 2017), p.29.

To summarise, the topic of gender and sexuality in the Middle Ages requires a significant amount of re-evaluation, aiming to dislodge arguments and theories of transgressive behaviour from the binary bias in which they were compiled. This dissertation will aim to evaluate these transgressions while taking the attitudes of their contemporary society into account and compare the effects of transgressions in the reign of Edward II to those of the wider Plantagenet Dynasty, while evaluating the importance of the models that came before, such as the heroic culture of ancient literature.

Part One: Medieval Femininity and the Male Transgression.

'As long as she thinks of a man, nobody objects to a woman thinking.'[20]

- Virginia Woolf.

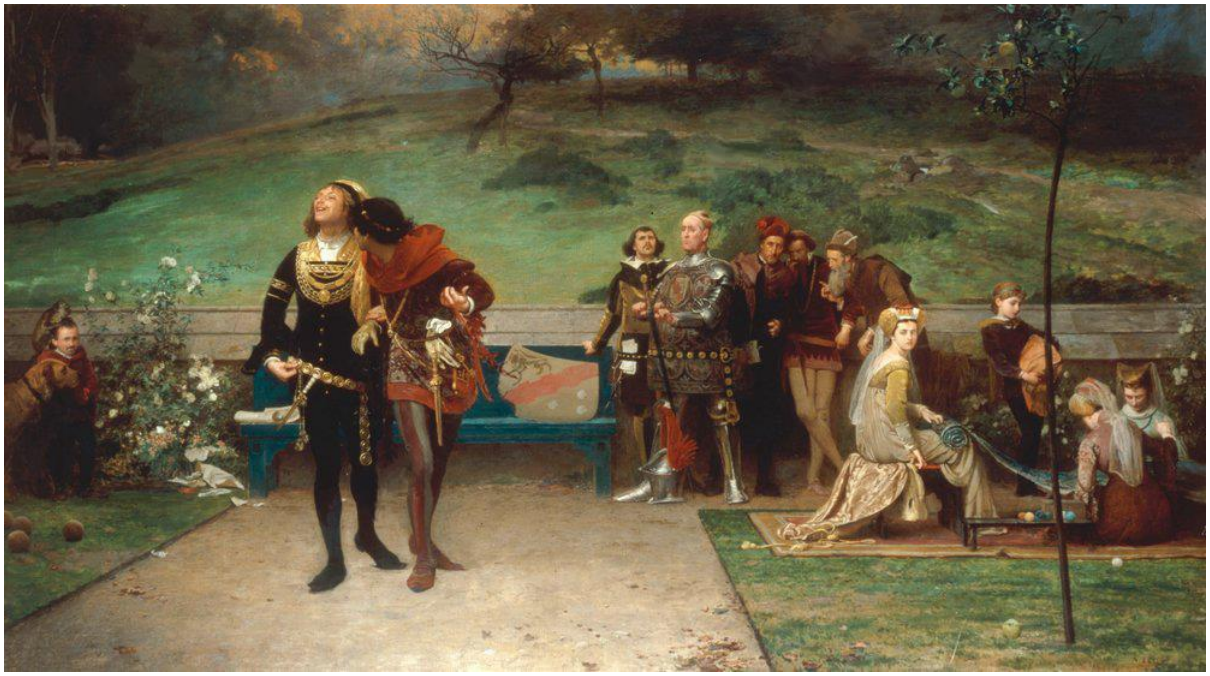

Fig. 1. Marcus Stone, 1872.

A painting depicting the English King Edward II cavorting with his favourite Piers Gaveston. Meanwhile, nobles, barons and courtiers look onwards towards the pair with concern.

[20] Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (London: Hogarth Press, 1928), p.160.

Chapter One: The Standardised Female.

The concept of gender in history is, like many other subjects, a topic that depends on the complexities of an ongoing dialogue from the past and present, however the influence of personal experiences and present-day opinions often impacts the way historians interpret the past.[21] Though this modern bias is visible in the majority of gender and sexuality studies in all periods of time, it is especially prominent in women's history and queer studies due to the modern desire for validation in the past for progressive concepts and advancements.[22] This validation narrative is visible in all studies of behaviour deemed as transgressive to its historical period, including the masculine actions of women, sodomy and many other sexual acts which were deemed queer. The modern perspective endeavours towards a more understanding society where women fight for equal rights and those with non-conforming gender and sexual identities strive for recognition and appeal for equality. Kosofsky Sedgwick cautioned against the projection of modern heteronormative societal norms onto figures and situations of the past, to avoid arbitrary conclusions on a variable historical culture.[23]

Considering the modern desire for validation in history, the study of these transgressive topics is lacking in comparison to the subject matters of a more standardised society, such as religion, politics and cisgender and heteronormative identities. Therefore, the study of the history of women in the medieval period has changed dramatically with the rise of feminist and equal rights movements.[24] With the rise of feminist historians and theorists in the 1980s and 1990s, the concept of women in history was replaced with the concept of gender. Butler

[21] J. Carpenter and S. MacLean, *Power of the Weak: Studies on Medieval Women* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1995), p.1.
[22] *ibid.*
[23] E. Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosexual Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p.22.
[24] Robertson, 'Medieval Feminism in Middle English Studies: A Retrospective', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature,* p.69.

and Benz St. John are examples of this progression in historical study, with work as controversial as it is celebrated, Butler's work especially is regarded for its influence upon historians and is renowned for its exploration into issues of sexual identity and biology.[25]

The scarcity of sources depicting the everyday lives of women in medieval Europe presents difficulties in accessing the materials needed to study the gender and sexuality of women in any detail. The majority of medieval literature was written both by and for men, specifically elite and privileged men such as the clergy,[26] thus the main vantagepoint historians are given into the inner workings of females comes through the eyes of men, in particular supposedly chaste and religious men.[27] Historical study into women and femininity rose in popularity due to the aforementioned feminist movements, leading to the focus of women's studies originating in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, motivated by the dramatic changes that the modern world bought to the female sex.[28] The expanding world of literature focused on women in these two centuries concentrated on details of the working class, also providing a new insight to the lives of the poor and underprivileged, a remarkable contrast to the elite-centred literature of previous centuries.[29]

Records of women before this time were solely focussed on those with money and status. Firstly, an insight into the lives of women can be provided by exploring the female ownership of texts and manuscripts, often reserved for those with the money to purchase such an item, or with a husband or father who was wealthy enough to gift a female a manuscript.[30] In

[25] See: J. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2011), and L. Benz St. John, *Three Medieval Queens, Queenship, and the Crown in Fourteenth-Century England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).
[26] Carpenter and MacLean, *Power of the Weak: Studies on Medieval Women*, p.1.
[27] Robertson, 'Medieval Feminism in Middle English Studies: A Retrospective', Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature, p.75.
[28] J. Bennet, *Women in the Medieval English Countryside: Gender and Household in Brigstock before the Plague* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p.3.
[29] *ibid.*, p.3.
[30] Robertson, 'Medieval Feminism in Middle English Studies: A Retrospective', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, p.73,

regard to the rare cases of literature written by women, this comes from those few who were able to receive a form of education to learn to read and write, namely those with titles.[31] The unfortunate fact is that with the severe disinterest in the lives of women in England until their political rights became a concern in the latter half of the nineteenth-century, there is little to be seen of the average working woman in medieval literature and chronicles until the outbreak of scholarship bought about by feminism.[32]

However medieval chroniclers, despite their disinterest in depicting the everyday lives of women, sought to keep account of all notable events in the English monarchy, including all royal marriages and queens, therefore the best source of information we have on medieval women depicts royalty.[33] Surviving chronicles detail the lives of women in regard to events on a national and international stage, for example marriages and alliances, therefore the women often depicted were those in more powerful positions in society.

This fascination of royal women in medieval literature only grows with the presence of more powerful women in the English monarchy; this is seen throughout historical chronicles as only the women of importance to the political and social development of England at the time are depicted in any detail. A significant example of this would be the rise in interest in women in literature during the early modern period bought about by the authority of a long-reigning female ruler; Elizabeth I.[34] However, smaller examples of this can be seen throughout medieval literature also, the lexis used by male authors is often male centred, therefore the description and mention of women in such writing is often heavily gendered. A woman, through her actions, is depicted as transgressive and therefore manly, or with the

[31] Bennet, *Women in the Medieval English Countryside: Gender and Household in Brigstock before the Plague,* p.3.
[32] S. M. Stuard, *Women in Medieval History and Historiography* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), p.2.
[33] *ibid.*
[34] Robertson, 'Medieval Feminism in Middle English Studies: A Retrospective', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature,* p.73.

deviousness of acting in the way of a sinful woman.[35] The women who do not act as either a man nor show the characteristics of a bad woman, therefore, are scarcely mentioned, meaning that the only women recorded at length in history are those deemed to not be acting in the appropriate way for a woman, or in a way which affects the politics of the time, hence her importance in contemporary literature. This speaks volumes for the role of women in the medieval period: do not act in such a way that you must be recorded in history. A woman's place is to do her duty as a daughter, wife and mother and nothing more significant than that, to be a woman depicted in history is therefore not necessarily a positive, for example Eleanor of Aquitaine who is a well-documented female figure in history is often depicted as transgressive due to her political prowess.[36]

The role and duty of a female can be summarised with a single word: subordination. Femininity in the medieval period is often closely linked with the stereotypical womanly duty, categorised by her service to men and therefore the overarching theme of femininity in the medieval period is subservience. Even writers recognized for their proto-feminist approach to subjects, such as Christine de Pisan in the fifteenth-century explore the inescapability of the subordinate female as a fundamental pillar of medieval life.[37] De Pisan argued in her writing that women could and should employ some level of influence over their husbands, however even the most respected and protected of women, such as princesses, will 'speak to [their] husband well and wisely… will very humbly petition him on behalf of the people'[38], yet despite any disagreement between the two the wife must 'love her husband and

[35] Stuard, *Women in Medieval History and Historiography*, p.2.
[36] H. Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth* (London: Faber & Faber, 2011), p.281.
[37] R. M. Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe* (London: Routledge, 2005), p.85.
[38] Christine de Pisan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, translated by S. Lawson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985) p.49.

live in peace with him' and should the husband abuse or hurt the wife 'she must put up with all of this... [or] take refuge in God.'[39]

The feminine act of subordination under the grip of men is taught to the medieval society primarily the teachings of the Christian church of medieval England and Europe.[40] Sermon literature throughout the medieval period draws on the stereotypes of masculinity and femininity in order to create examples of situations with the purpose of teaching the female sex how to behave and act as well as shaping the expectation of men in regard to their female companions. Jacques de Vitry portrays a woman who is in the relentless habit of disobeying and contradicting her husband.[41] To counter her, the husband places a table for her to sit at beside a riverbank, to spite the husband she moves farther away from the table to oppose the request the husband has made, and she falls into the river from moving too far. The husband then runs upstream to help pull her from the water.

When the husband speaks to his companions about the incident, they question that he went upstream for her, rather than looking for her downstream where the current would have pulled her, the husband replies 'don't you know that my wife always does the contrary thing and never the right way? I believe that she will go up the current, not downstream as others do.'[42] Of course, intellect tells us that a woman's wilfulness will not actually counter the current of the river, nor stop her from being pulled downstream, the tale therefore warns the listener that a woman who is disobedient, often getting herself into trouble through this insubordination, should not expect to be rescued, especially by the husband they often undermine.[43]

[39] *ibid.*, pp.62-64.
[40] Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, p.86.
[41] Jacques de Vitry, *The Exempla*, translated by T. F. Crane (London: David Nutt, 1890), p.94.
[42] *ibid.*
[43] Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, p.86.

The religious attitude towards the subordination of women as a point of femininity is seen throughout history with many examples of such behaviour in the English monarchy. Due to the normalisation of such treatment of insubordinate women, the narrative of a female's safety and comfort in her marriage being in direct link to her attitude and behaviour is often heightened to the extent that women were punished for transgressions against their husbands that were out of their control. It is an example of this extremity that we can find in the marriage of Edward II of England and his queen: Isabella of France.

Isabella, born between May and November 1295 in Paris, France was the only surviving daughter of Philip IV of France and Joan I of Navarre.[44] At this time, conflict between the English and the French was rife and the two countries found themselves in a period of severe crisis of Anglo-French relations.[45] Pope Boniface VIII saw Isabella as an opportunity to quell the everlasting conflict raging between the two royals' fathers Philip IV of France and Edward I of England and orchestrated the promise of marriage between Isabella and the future Edward II.[46] The French princess arrived in England at the age of 12, whilst England was in the midst of growing Baronial conflict, after being raised in the Louvre Palace with her nursemaid Théophania de Saint-Pierre.[47]

In January of 1322, Isabella's youngest brother, twenty-eight-year-old Charles, succeeded their brother Philip V as king, becoming King Charles IV of France. The French throne had gone through a period of great change following the death of Philip IV, with three other rulers between Isabella's father and her youngest brother Charles. Charles IV was set to be the fifth king to sit upon the French throne since the proposal of marriage of Edward and

[44] S. Menache, 'Isabella of France, Queen of England, A Postscript', *Revue belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* (Belgium: Société pour le Progrès des Études Philologiques et Historiques, 2012), p.494.
[45] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, p.281.
[46] Menache, *Revue belge de Philologie et d'Histoire,* p.494.
[47] *ibid.*

Isabella and although there had been great tension between the two nations throughout this period, disputes had remained somewhat peaceful until Charles IV's reign.[48]

Following the growing tension and imminent crisis, England's queen found herself in a period of uncertainty with her personal safety at risk, the French-born queen's foreignness was exposed and many in Edward's court took the opportunity to undermine her.[49] The circulation of rumours and reports which spread through the English court throughout the reign of Edward II aimed to assert a specific narrative of the unholiness of Isabella, most notably due to the efforts of political actors and influential public figures close to the king.[50]

The importance of containing rumour became significant in this time period, as the constantly negotiated boundaries between truth, licit treason and defamatory speculation put pressure on the public opinion of Isabella as part of the English monarchy.[51] The use of rumour as a weapon for political gain and the desire to manipulate public opinion has been widely considered and explored in modern scholarship[52] and records found for these strategies having been deployed as part of political articulation. Written records show the use of political influence by oral means, including regular use of aforementioned tactics by the English crown to garner support for its wars in both Scotland and France.[53] For example, in 1346, the crown of King Edward III, the legitimate son of Edward II and Isaabella of France, ordered an account of the causes of his wars in France to be sent to the English Dominicans, with the intent to provide the Dominican preachers, who were famed for their skill, with the

[48] W. W. Kibler, *Medieval France: An Encyclopedia (*London: Routledge, 1995), p.314.
[49] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, p.281.
[50] L. Slater, *Rumour and Reputation Management in Fourteenth-Century England: Isabella of France in Text and Image*, (Peterhouse: University of Cambridge: 2018), p.2.
[51] ibid.
[52] S. Justice, *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p.12
[53] Slater, *Rumour and Reputation Management in Fourteenth-Century England: Isabella of France in Text and Image*, p.2.

material needed to inform their subjects of the justified reasons for war and to 'enliven' the faith of the people.[54]

By 1322 Isabella had only acted as the perfect wife and queen, she had given Edward multiple heirs, aided in keeping the peace between England and France and maintaining positive Anglo-French relation and steered Edward towards reconciliation with some of his subjects,[55] all while turning a blind eye to Edward's own transgressions which will be discussed in Chapter 3. In return, Isabella was met with marginalisation and intimidation bought on by her nationality, a fact which she could not change, despite all her personal attempts to be subordinate to her husband. Despite Edward's treatment of Isabella as punishment for her homeplace, he still expected the queen to act as the perfect subservient 'loyal lapdog',[56] Edward had always depended on French support, garnered by his wife in his battles against the Barons who opposed him in court,[57] and seemingly when that French support given by Isabella was no longer offered, Edward's loyalty to his wife and his desire for her comfort and safety was lost also.

In response to the insubordinate acts which Edward felt his wife guilty of, riled up by the opportunistic Hugh Despencer the Younger, Isabella was 'systematically stripped of her comforts as queen'.[58] Though chroniclers subsequent to Edward II's reign display sympathy for the queen and her predicament it is with the knowledge of her later transgressive plots against the king that one finds chroniclers with the inability to condone Isabella's actions. This is due to the desire to not normalise more masculine traits in females.[59] Isabella's household was cleansed of all French influence and any comforts from her

[54] *ibid.*
[55] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, p.278.
[56] *ibid.*
[57] P. C. Doherty, *Isabella and the Strange death of Edward II.* (London: Robinson, 2003), p.54.
[58] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, p.281.
[59] W. M. Ormrod, 'The Sexualities of Edward II', *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives*, edited by G. Dodd and A Musson (London: York Medieval Press, 2006), p.42.

homeland following Charles IV's succession, twenty-seven of the individuals in Isabella's closest service, including her doctor and chaplains, were removed from court for being French.[60] According to one of the most reliable and illuminating chronicles from the reign of Edward II, it was Despenser whom Isabella blamed for the removal of those closest to her, writing; 'certainly [Isabella] does not like Hugh…by whom she was deprived of her servants and dispossessed of all her rents'.[61] Edward also had their youngest children – eight year old John, six year old Eleanor and three year old Joan, removed from Isabella's custody to be raised by Despenser's wife and sister, since the children did not yet have their own households.[62]

These acts were a direct retaliation to the fact that Isabella's homeland France was no longer in the service of her husband's kingdom, thus in Edward's mind warranting the complete removal of all that Isabella loved and cared for, placing her in a position of isolation and marginalisation at court. Edward is likely to have been influenced by Hugh Despenser to treat Isabella in such a way, the *Vita* reads that 'the king's hardness is blamed on Hugh, like the other evils that take place at court'.[63] Although the origin of the idea is up for question, the completion of such treatment of a wife by her husband shows the subordinate position the female sex stereotypically held in this period.

The ways in which men held women in a subordinate position included those of the law; legal processes which allowed for the poor treatment of women by their husbands if they did not act in the appropriate ways. In most places across Europe throughout the medieval period there were no legal implications against men who beat their wives, so long as the abuse was

[60] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, p.281.
[61] *Vita Edwardi Secundi: The Life of Edward the Second,* translated by W. R. Childs (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.229.
[62] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, p.281.
[63] *Vita Edwardi Secundi: The Life of Edward the Second,* p.231.

not excessive or caused death.[64] However, according to Dodd and Musson, during the Plantagenet dynasty England treated abuse allegations with a serious tone when the monarchy was involved; allegations of marital abuse carried the serious implication of an unsustainable marriage, which when involving the monarchy was a severe offence as the collapse of a royal marriage could threaten the integrity of the entire kingdom.[65]

After being sent to France by Edward to calm the ever-growing resentment between the two nations, Isabella refused to return to England claiming she should not be expected to return 'because of the threat of physical violence'.[66] The allegation of abuse against the king was taken seriously and the queen excused from her infringement on her wifely duties, these duties being expected to return when asked to.[67] According to medieval texts, the masculine logic was that rules were set 'according to reason, good faith and fraternal affection, without regard to the wilful pleasure of women' [68] therefore the requirement set out by the king, regarding the actions of his queen, were to be followed regardless of the desire of the female.

Isabella therefore was supplied a certain level of protection against the offence of insubordination and transgressing against the female duties expected of her as a wife due to her role as a queen. However, these protections were granted to her not as a queen herself, but as the wife of a king. It is the sanctity and stability of a royal union that was being protected, rather than Isabella herself and therefore the aim was not to aid the woman in being free from the abuse she may be suffering, as would be the priority in a modern couple, but rather to keep her alive to continue her female duties and more specifically, to continue aiding the king

[64] Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe,* p.86.
[65] G. Dodd and A. Musson, *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives* (London: York Medieval Press, 2005), p.42.
[66] *ibid.*
[67] *ibid.*
[68] *Calendar of Close Rolls 1323-1327 preserved in the Public Record Office* (London: H. M. Stationary Office, 1892), p.579.

in the most effective way – by producing heirs and being a political pawn.[69] Consequently, even the most powerful and protected women in the world – queens – were tied to the subordinate role in their marriages, as per the expectation of their gender.

Even a woman as powerful as Isabella, who was not only the wife of the English king but also a French princess, firstly the daughter of the French king and later the sister to the French successor, was not protected by the church or the law in marriage, instead expected to be dutiful and subordinate no matter her treatment from her husband. Kantorowicz defined the ruling institution of 'the crown' as being split into two variables:

> The visible material crown with which the prince was invested and adorned at his coronation and [also] an invisible and immaterial crown, encompassing all the royal rights and privileges indispensable for the government of the body politic.[70]

The variable of the crown institution, an encompassing politic, therefore garnered protection to those who were members of the monarchy. This metaphorical crown also allowed for the constant judgement one faced as royalty and placed royalty in a position above others. The end of the eleventh-century saw changes in the powers possessed by a queen as well as a shift in their status in court through the separation of the king's and queen's households.[71] The consequence of this was the public view that the queen was no longer a part of the infrastructure of the king's household, rendering the queen's government influence as obtained only through her personal and private relationship with the king and not via an official manner, thus marginalising the queen and her influence.[72] This once again presents

[69] T. M. Vann, *Queens, Regents and Potentates* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 1993), p.161.
[70] E. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p.337.
[71] L. Benz St. John, *Three Medieval Queens, Queenship, and the Crown in Fourteenth-Century England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p.11.
[72] *ibid.*

the subordinate position which even queens found themselves in, at the mercy of the decisions of their husbands and kings.

Subordination, therefore, is the defining characteristic of femininity, even in queenship, and insubordination the distinctive feature of transgressive women. As a woman in the Plantagenet dynasty, Isabella of France was given no more protection than any other, her gender led to the expectation of her femininity and therefore her subservience and any actions taken against the will of her husband were in direct violation not only of her marriage vows but also her duty as a female.

Chapter Two: The Anal Rape Narrative.

In modern society, the variation between biology, gender identity and sexual orientation are all separate social models within which one can freely have differing identities.[73] For example, a twenty-first-century individual may be assigned the female sex at birth, as per their biology, may also identify as the female gender and yet have a sexual desire for women. These factors can co-exist in modern society, the majority will understand that the sexual desire for women from a woman is a same-sex or homoerotic desire which does not affect the individual's gender or sexual identity. However, in the medieval period, these three concepts; biology, gender and sexual desire, did not exist separate to one another and instead the three facets work together to form one singular identity.[74]

If we apply the same individual from our modern example to the medieval period, a medieval society would view the desire for women as a passion from the masculine body, therefore constituting masculine behaviour and identity. Despite the lack of differing gender identities in the medieval period this view would paint the individual as more male than female, making them a defective or transgressive female acting outside of their sex.[75] Homoerotic relations, therefore, spoke more for the gender of an individual in the medieval period than it did for their sexual orientation.

The link between sex and gender does not appear from nowhere in the Middle Ages; instead it is a tradition passed down between historical eras and visible in many time periods. In Greco-Roman medical and philosophical texts this same all-encompassing identity is also visible over the modern concept of separated identities, specifically in the Roman era as it was their belief that sexual moderation was required in order to preserve gender identity.[76]

[73] Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe,* p.7.
[74] *ibid.*
[75] *ibid.,* p.8.
[76] V. L. Bullough, *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.83.

Masculinity in sex was linked to ejaculation in Roman belief, as Areteaus of Cappadocia, an ancient Greek physician had claimed to locate masculinity in semen meaning that a male could lose their masculinity if they ejaculated too regularly.[77] As stereotypical masculine traits such as authority and strength were part of the foundation of Roman civilisation, to the extent where females were excluded from many forms of public life in order to not influence society, the concept of losing masculine qualities therefore was crippling to Roman society and sexual moderation was seen as not only healthy, but also necessary to keep a Roman civilisation alive.[78]

The same Roman society, as well as Greco-Roman writing, also viewed females as significantly more sexual beings than men and sexual lust as a feminine trait. The Greek myth of Tiresias explores the female's enjoyment of sexual intercourse as well as their sexual capability. In this myth, Tiresias was turned into the female form for seven years before being returned to his male stature, when asked about the difference between sex with either gender by the goddess Hera, Tiresias responds:

> If the parts of love pleasure be counted as ten,
> Thrice three go to women, one only to men.[79]

The Greco-Roman view on sexual intercourse and gender helped shape the medieval way of thinking, keeping aspects of the hierarchical nature of sexual roles. As previously discussed, the ancient world associated the concept of the male gender, linked with rational thought and action, to ejaculation and therefore semen and men of the early Christian church used these defining characteristics of ancient masculinity to rationalise male authority over females and

[77] P. Ariès et al, *A History of Private Life: From Pagan Rome to Byzantium* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1992), p.243.
[78] *ibid.*
[79] V. L. Bullough and B. Bullough, *Cross Dressing, Sex and Gender* (New York: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), p.33.

therefore the role of female subordination even in sexual intercourse.[80] Isidore of Seville, a Spanish scholar and cleric, regarded by nineteenth-century historian Montalembert as 'the last scholar of the ancient world'[81] summarised this concept in his writing, stating that 'women are under the power of men because they are frequently spiritually fickle. Therefore, they should be governed by the power of men', Isidore also refers to the male in his writings as the 'head of a woman'.[82] Male power was seen as active in the Greco-Roman perspective, meaning that a male was expected to be active both in society and in a sexual relationship, men's sexuality was thought to originate in the loins, an area of the body which represented strength and power, thus making the male the active partner.[83] Female sexuality was understood to be located in the navel, which represented passivity and nurture, making the female sex passive both in the outside world and within sexual intercourse.[84] The passive role, therefore, was the feminine role in Greco-Roman society and thought, a concept which withstood the test of time and continued into the medieval period.

The passive sexual role was highly feminised in medieval Europe and considering the lack of separated concepts of gender and sexual identity, one's sexual role had a direct impact on the way in which their gender was viewed in the Middle Ages. The way in which medieval individuals viewed sexual intercourse itself was different to how we may view the same acts today, the most significant difference being that the medieval concept of sexual intercourse was that it was understood sexual acts were something one person did to another person, rather than a joint experience, meaning there were two sexual roles in all standard liaisons.[85] These roles are the active or masculine role and the passive or feminine role.

[80] Bullough, *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, p.85.
[81] C. F. Montalembert, *Les Moines d'Occident depuis Saint Benoît jusqu'à Saint Bernard [The Monks of the West from Saint Benoit to Saint Bernard]* (Paris: J. Lecoffre, 1860).
[82] Isidore of Seville, *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis*, (London: Verso, 1991), p.21.
[83] Bullough, *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, p.85.
[84] *ibid.*
[85] Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, p.4.

Medieval lexis embodies this difference. Commonly the modern-day terminology to discuss sexual intercourse would be 'to have sex', which connotes a shared experience, or an action two people do together.[86] However, medieval terminology was different to this. The *Middle English Dictionary* recognises the term *swiven* and acknowledges two meanings of *swive*, the first being 'to have sexual intercourse', and the second 'to have sexual intercourse with a woman'.[87] Another example is the French verb *foutre*, in modern French this can refer to a man, woman or couple; however the traditional use of this verb meant 'to penetrate' and the subject – therefore the active sexual role – was always a male.[88]

The difference in terminology is visible even as late as the Old Norse language, the term *sorðit,* from *serða,* was a verb used to mean 'to penetrate', this is the active role in sexual intercourse. The same word however also has a passive form; *sorðinn,* which meant 'to be used sexually by a man' or 'to be penetrated'.[89] This word, like its later equivalents, referred solely to the roles in sexual intercourse rather than the gender of the individuals however once again the connotations of the two roles directly feeds into the stereotypes of gender norms and therefore expected sexual roles.

With this terminology in mind, it is clear that from the medieval perspective there was always a passive and an active role in sexual intercourse, which had a direct link to gender roles. These passive and active roles had little to do with who was more lustful in a relationship, nor who initiated the sexual encounter, rather the distinction between the roles was referred to instead as the penetrator and the penetrated.[90]

[86] *ibid.*
[87] R. E. Lewis, *Middle English Dictionary* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1988), s.v. swiven.
[88] Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe,* p.4.
[89] Bullough, *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality,* p.378.
[90] Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe,* p.5.

There is some debate regarding to what extent medieval society understood and linked the concepts of gender and sex. Bullough believes that the medieval understanding relied on a non-binary approach, following the teachings of Aristotle that there is only in fact one sex; males, and that females were merely defective, or incomplete, males.[91] Though medieval philosophers were particularly influenced by the work of Aristotle, and some may have agreed with his teachings on this topic of female inferiority, most tended to disagree with Aristotle on this specific point. St Thomas Aquinas disagreed with the aforementioned teachings, arguing that women could not be defective men as they were all part of God's intention.[92] Despite Aquinas' disagreements with Aristotle's work, Aquinas still did not consider women to be equal to men in status or power, he wrote 'by such a kind of subjection woman is naturally subject to man, because naturally in man the discretion of reason predominates',[93] thus debating the innate nature in which women were subordinate to men. It is however important to note that the works of Aristotle also influenced later philosophers in the renaissance period, cultivating the idea of gender binaries and thus separating the two sexes: male and female in this period.[94]

The other argument regarding the link between sex and gender in the medieval period refers to the existence of a third gender. Karras argues that because of the standardisation of reproduction in the medieval period, to the extent where reproduction was both common and expected of most people, those who renounced the opportunity to have children became neither male nor female but rather a third gender, this included those who chose celibacy in

[91] Aristotle, *Generation of Animals,* translated by A. L. Peck (Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library), p.xxvi.
[92] Bullough, *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality,* p.225.
[93] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica,* translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1947), pt. 1.
[94] A. Moseley, *Aristotle* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), p.200.

order to pursue a life of religion.[95] However despite this opposition to the binary of gender, medieval people still saw no issue in labelling nuns as women and monks as men.

This concept plays into the theme of passive and active roles in sexual intercourse due to the way in which those who transgressed out of their assigned sexual role were viewed by society. The concept that the active role is the penetrator and therefore the male and the passive role is the penetrated and therefore the female is carried over to all forms of sexual intercourse. In male same-sex relations, therefore, the individual who is penetrated in anal intercourse is therefore perceived as the female in the relationship.[96] In the case of female same-sex relations, medieval texts depict a great deal of confusion about the moral status of this form of sexual intercourse, the most likely conclusion is that in medieval society female on female sex was not considered as intercourse unless one woman penetrated the other through artificial phallic means, thus giving one of them the male or active role in sex.[97]

When applying this thought therefore to the concept of transgressive gender, a discussion is warranted on whether the active participant in male same-sex intercourse is transgressing again his gender or not, due to the gendered roles in sex. In a homosexual liaison which includes penetration, the active participant is playing the same role in sexual intercourse as they would with a female partner, since the medieval period had no concept of homosexuality or sexual orientation as terms themselves, instead using gender to describe relationships, the gender of the passive participant does not affect the role of the active individual.

In relation to Edward II, it is important to remember this gendered bias in which medieval society would view same-sex relations. Haines and Warner are almost certain that Edward II preferred the company of men and infamously had two men in his life, firstly Piers Gaveston

[95] Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, p.6.
[96] *ibid.*, p.5.
[97] *ibid.*, p.6.

and secondly Hugh Despenser the Younger. [98] Although these men and relationships are known to us, their nature is still partially undetermined, since none of these three aforementioned men recorded their own perspectives of their liaisons for later historical review. Chronicles of the reign of Edward II do however confirm his acts of same-sex relations:

> *Ipse quidem Edwardus in vitio sodomitico nimium delectabat, et fortuna ac gratia omni suo tempore carere videbatur.*
>
> This same Edward delighted too much in the vice of sodomy, and seemed to lack good fortune and grace all the time. [99]

Similarly, the *Vita* details the close bond between Edward II and his presumed lover Piers Gaveston, detailing their time away together over one Christmas as making up for 'the former absence by their long-desired closeness and conversation.'[100] These chronicles shed light on the nature of Edward II's relations with the men in his life, specifically Piers Gaveston as we find far more evidence for their sodomitical relationship than that of Edward and Hugh Despenser, though some evidence does exist.[101] However, these texts do not consider the impact of the roles each man participated in during their sexual exploits and whether Edward II's sodomitical actions led to transgressive behaviour.

The main way in which we can evaluate the sexual roles of Edward II, Gaveston and Despenser is through the potential method of Edward II's death. Both Gaveston and Despenser were murdered by plots against Edward and Edward's own death was formulated as a part of his abdication from the English throne, therefore these events are heavily discussed in chronicles and recorded in detail. The death of Edward II displays the public

[98] See: R. M. Haines, *King Edward II: His Life, His Reign and its Aftermath, 1284 – 1330* (Montreal: McGill-Queens Press, 2003), p.64. and K. Warner, *Edward II: The Unconventional King* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2014), p. 233.
[99] *Chronica Monasterii de Melsa,* edited by E. A. Bond (London: Rolls Series, 1866).
[100] *Vita Edwardi Secundi: The Life of Edward the Second,* p.17.
[101] L. Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilisation* (London: The Belknap Press, 2006), p.375.

opinion of Edward's private life while simultaneously connoting the gendered role in which Edward supposedly displayed in his homosexual liaisons. The death of Edward II has been widely debated for centuries, with disagreements on the validity of some of the tales surrounding the event, for this discussion however it is important to evaluate these stories as they display propaganda and opinion which accurately presents the attitudes towards Edward's supposed sodomy, despite how feasible and realistic these tales may be.

Firstly, it is important to establish the circumstances surrounding the death of Edward II, before applying gendered ideologies to the tales of his death method. In March 1325 Queen Isabella sailed from Dover to the port of Wissant outside of Boulogne by request of Edward II. This was a plan to appease the French king, Isabella's brother Charles IV, who had agreed to allow Isabella to pay homage to him as Edward's emissary.[102] This effort benefitted Edward greatly, his current favourite Hugh Despenser was unwelcome in France and the King was anxious not to separate from him due to the fate that befall Gaveston, Charles' affection for his sister also put England in a positive place politically, as Charles was willing to confirm England's possession of French territories and renew the truce between the two kingdoms that had been agreed the previous September.[103] Despite the overtly positive outcomes of such an agreement, Edward failed to take one singularly issue into consideration: Isabella's disloyalty. Despite a successful trip, Isabella made no haste to return to England, instead pleading with her husband to allow their son and Edward's heir to sail to France to join her so that Prince Edward could be appointed as Duke of Aquitaine by his uncle King Charles.[104] In September of the same year, Prince Edward sailed to join his mother as she plotted to depose her husband and place their son on the throne in his stead.[105]

[102] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, p.283.
[103] *ibid.*, p. 284.
[104] *The Chronicle of Lanercost 1272 – 1346*, translated by H. Maxwell (Glasgow: James Maclehose and Sons, 1913), p.249.
[105] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, p.285.

Despite Edward's efforts for the two to return safely and conveniently, the next time Isabella set foot on English soil it was as an enemy to England's king. Chronicles depict the torn aspect of England during this period, many believing Isabella to be a 'betrayer of the king and kingdom', but some considering that she 'was acting for peace and the common welfare of the kingdom, and for the removal of evil counsellors of the king'.[106]

No matter Isabella's intentions, it was not long before Edward was captured on route to Ireland and sent first to Kenilworth Castle and later to Berkeley Castle to be kept in captivity.[107] During his captivity Isabella and her supposed lover Roger Mortimer began ruling England through the acquisition of the great seal, which had been taken from Edward upon his capture; they used this to control all public pronouncements made by the King and eventually on 20 January 1327, Edward II was forced to resign his crown to his son, who was anointed as Edward III on 1 February of the same year.[108] Due to the young age of England's new king, Isabella and Mortimer ruled through his council, met with both support and hostility by those around them.[109] After a few unsuccessful attempts at rescuing the former king by his allies, Edward II died on 21 September 1327 at Berkeley Castle.

As previously stated, the death of Edward II has surrounding it much debate and discussion as there are many theories as to how he died. The infamous tale of Edward's death, often labelled as the 'anal rape narrative', can provide a valuable insight into the attitudes of those surrounding Edward and his death while simultaneously providing a glimpse into the homoerotic actions of the late king. The anal rape narrative depicts the death method of Edward II as via a soldering iron or poker, made red hot on the fire, being inserted into Edward II via his anus and through to his bowels, thus torturously burning him from the

[106] *The Chronicle of Lanercost 1272 – 1346*, p.250.
[107] *ibid.*, p.253.
[108] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, p.299.
[109] *ibid.*, p.300.

inside and leaving no outward mark, so that his death could be passed off as by natural causes.[110] The anal rape narrative is described by chroniclers as such:

> Then, with a plumber's soldering iron, made red hot, and thrust through the tube leading to the secret parts of his bowels, they burnt out his inner parts and then his breath of life. For they were afraid that if a wound was found on the body of the king… his torturers might be compelled to answer for an obvious injury and suffer punishment for it.[111]

Historians Mortimer and Evans believe that the anal rape narrative first emerged in the immediate aftermath of Edward II's death and burial, first as rumour which lent itself to anti-Edwardian propaganda and possibly originating from an anti-establishment account.[112] The anal rape narrative was meant to draw upon the traditional male heterosexual paranoia surrounding the pain, trauma and intent behind anal penetration, thus emasculating the individual receiving such penetration.[113] This story, therefore, emasculates the late Edward II by placing him in the passive sexual role, thus amplifying the fears of many surrounding his capability as a man and therefore his ability as a king – the qualifications of which will be discussed later in chapter 6 – and justifying his deposition.

However, despite the negative connotations of the anal rape narrative, the tale appears in the Chronicle of Geoffrey le Baker, who wrote not history but hagiography, his chronicle written with the intention of aiding the campaign of Edward III and Philippa of Hainault which aimed for the canonisation of Edward II.[114] Baker's intention, therefore, was to portray Edward II as saintly as well as victimised in his death. Therefore, Baker's chronicle cannot be taken as the gospel truth, due to the nature of its creation and the likelihood of exaggeration to achieve the desired outcome and portrayal of Edward II, Baker is also keen to place blame

[110] Ormrod, 'The Sexualities of Edward II', *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives,* p.37.
[111] Geoffrey le Baker, *The Chronicle of Geoffrey le Baker* (Suffolk, The Boydell Press, 2012), p.32.
[112] Ormrod, 'The Sexualities of Edward II', *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives,* p.38.
[113] *ibid.,* pp.38-39.
[114] Warner, *Edward II: The Unconventional King*, p. 233.

on Isabella for Edward's poor treatment at Berkeley, of which there is no solid evidence for.[115] Instead, there is evidence that Edward was treated well at Berkeley, an entry on the *Close Roll* displays the expenses of Edward's household during his imprisonment, indicating that he had servants attending him in his cell as well as castle records displaying expensive wine, food and wax being bought to him regularly.[116] This is a very different picture of Edward's treatment than that portrayed in the chronicle of Geoffrey le Baker, who depicts the cell of Edward II being close to that of the cellar, which held corpses, thus leading to the stench of rotting meat in Edward's chamber, with the intention of suffocating him.[117]

The probability of the anal rape narrative being anything more than propaganda is slim and most likely Edward's death occurred in some other way as this narrative has definitive aims to create a certain attitude towards the late king, firstly to emasculate him and justify his death and in later texts to portray him as a martyr and Christlike figure.

It is more likely that Edward died of natural causes. The earliest unofficial account of Edward's death, The *Brut,* equates the loss of life to illness, however it is likely that this chronicle was composed before the trial of Roger Mortimer in 1330 which found him guilty of the crime of murder against the late king.[118] The same text is also subject to a longer version, of which the death of Edward II is then recorded as the anal rape narrative. This is also visible in the second version of Higden's *Polychronicon,* another main chronicle used for the circulation of the hot poker tale.[119]

Though these texts reissued their reasonings behind Edward's death, altering their opinions to line up with the anal rape narrative, Archbishop Melton pronounced the death of Edward II to

[115] *ibid.,* p.234.
[116] Warner, *Edward II: The Unconventional King,* p.234.
[117] Geoffrey le Baker, *The Chronicle of Geoffrey le Baker,* p.32.
[118] I. Mortimer, 'Sermons of Sodomy: A Reconsideration of Edward II's Sodomitical Reputation', *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives,* edited by G. Dodd and A. Musson (London: York Medieval Press, 2006), p.53.
[119] *ibid.,* p.55.

be due to a fall. However, no further sources repeat this pronouncement,[120] therefore it is unlikely that a fall would be the cause due to the lack of evidence and lack of repetition in other sources.

Geoffrey le Baker, despite firstly depicting the anal rape narrative, also depicts the suffocation of Edward II as part of his death, writing 'they suddenly seized him as he lay on his bed, and smothered and suffocated him with great, heavy mattresses, in weight more than that of fifteen strong men.'[121] Suffocation, due to the lack of physical evidence left behind using this method, is not as unlikely as the theory of a fall which would leave marks, and perhaps the use of both suffocation paired with the practises displayed in the anal rape narrative could be a likely occurrence.

The reasoning behind the hot poker as a death method was to leave no evidence of murder, however Baker writes that the screams of Edward II could be heard by nearby villagers, thus not making this the evidence-free murder planned.[122] Also, the hot poker was a murder method which provided a great deal of uncertainty for the murderer, it likely would take the victim a number of hours or even days to die from such torture, making it ineffective for the secret murder of a former king, as well as being unnecessarily grotesque when there are tried and tested methods readily available, such as suffocation.[123]

The anal rape narrative, therefore, is most likely propaganda and not a realistic method of death. Despite this causing additional confusion surrounding the actual death method of Edward II, the rumour around his death provides a better insight into the opinions of the medieval society more so than a clear death method. The reasoning behind this death rumour can provide insight into the attitudes towards Edward at the time of his death while also

[120] *ibid.*
[121] Geoffrey le Baker, *The Chronicle of Geoffrey le Baker,* p.32.
[122] Warner, *Edward II: The Unconventional King*, p. 244.
[123] *ibid.*

offering perspective into the aforementioned active and passive gender roles in sexual intercourse. The anal rape narrative presents Edward II as the passive or feminine role in a homoerotic sexual liaison while simultaneously representing the sado-masochistic aspects of sodomitical relationships.[124] Despite Edward often previously being cast as the more masculine role in his relationship with Piers Gaveston, the subordination in which Edward fell victim to under the spell of Hugh Despenser the younger is therefore depicted in the role as the sodomiser, rather than the sodomised, this role as the subordinate sexual partner is taken on by Edward – albeit unwillingly – in the anal rape narrative.[125]

If we take the death of Hugh Despenser the Younger into consideration while discussing the gendered roles of Edward II's sodomitical relationships and death, the gendered bias is more visible. Hugh Despenser the Younger was sentenced as 'a thief and a criminal' to be hung 'drawn and quartered and [pieces of his body] sent throughout the realm',[126] and according to Jean le Bel and Froissart, Despenser's genitalia was cut off as a symbol of his crime of sodomy and heresy. Froissart recounts part of Despenser's punishment as follows:

> He was condemned by the unanimous verdict of the barons and knights to suffer the following punishment. First, he was dragged on a hurdle through all the streets of Hereford, to the sound of horns and trumpets, until he reached the main square of the town, where all the people were assembled. There he was tied to a long ladder, so that everyone could see him. A big fire had been lit in the square. When he had been tied up, his member and his testicles were first cut off, because he was a heretic and a sodomite, even, it was said, with the King, and this was why the King had driven away the Queen on his suggestion.[127]

The complementary stories surrounding the deaths of both Edward II and Hugh Despenser sexualises the political relationship between the pair. Despenser in his death was removed of

[124] Ormrod, 'The Sexualities of Edward II', *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives,* p.37.
[125] *ibid.,* p.39.
[126] K. Warner, *Hugh Despenser the Younger and Edward II: Downfall of a King's Favourite* (London: Pen & Sword Books ltd, 2018), p.267.
[127] Jean Froissart, *Chronicles,* translated by G. Brereton (London: Penguin Classics, 1978), p.50.

his genitalia, a symbol of his masculinity as well as his dominant and active role in a sodomitical relationship whereas Edward in the anal rape narrative was tortured with being sodomised, therefore taking the passive sexual role.[128] Though we cannot know which sexual role either of the two men took on if any homoerotic relation did occur between them, this displays the way in which they were viewed by their enemies and therefore presented to society. Ormrod notably argues that the death methods of Edward and Despenser construct a relationship between truth and propaganda which relies upon the 'sexualised imagery of a meeting between Hugh's genitals and Edward's anus'[129] and therefore provides representation of the assumed sexual deviancy attached to the king.

The representation of gender roles in death, most notably that of Edward II in the anal rape narrative, presents the way in which one can transgress against the gender norms placed upon medieval society. Despite any other actions of Edward II and the masculinity he may present in life, the method – or rumour – of his death is a contributing factor to his gender transgressions, despite his death being out of his control. The supposed sodomy committed by Edward does not directly play into his emasculation, while considering Edward's relationship with Piers Gaveston the king was not presented as the subordinate figure in the liaison, rather Gaveston was. In his relationship with Despenser, however, it is clear through the anal rape narrative that the popular opinion lent towards Edward as the subordinate and passive role, thus transgressing against his masculinity.

The transgressions of Edward II in relation to his gender through his sexual habits is however dependant on his role both as a passive sexual partner and a sodomite, though his role as the submissive partner is debated through the anal rape narrative, it is also applicable to analyse the likelihood of Edward's accusations of sodomy bearing any truth. The classification of

[128] Ormrod, 'The Sexualities of Edward II', *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives,* p.39.
[129] *ibid.,* p.37.

Edward as a sodomite, and therefore the discussion surrounding the probability of the king engaging in homoerotic activity is therefore necessary to discuss.

Chapter Three: The Vice of Sodomy.

Sodomy in the medieval period is far more complex than the modern-day interpretation of the word. Today, the term sodomy is often thought to mean solely male same-sex intercourse, as the term sodomite has previously been used interchangeably with other terms with negative connotations to refer to gay men alone.[130] The targeting of male homosexuals with this term is thought to have stemmed from the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah, the originators of this word, the tale reads about the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah due to the immorality of the residents and their homosexual activities.[131] Eventually, the church deemed all acts of male homosexuality regardless of context, act or consent as sodomy and those who partook as sodomites,[132] the outcome therefore is the subconscious link between sodomy and homosexuality that continues throughout history and into the modern period of historical study which leads to homosexual activity being the main quantifier of sodomy for centuries to come.

The legal and historical definition of the term sodomy however is broader than this. Sodomy in fact refers to all sexual relations which are deemed as a crime against nature,[133] not just those between two men. In the medieval period, sodomy as a term was used to encompass any non-procreative sexual activity, from extremes such as bestiality (sexual acts between a human and animal) to any form of oral or anal sex between consenting adults, even if married, as this could not lead to reproduction.[134] Where today the binary opposites of sexual relations are on one side heterosexual affection, and the other side homosexual orientation, for those in the medieval world the binary was far more abrupt. Heterosexual and homosexual desire were secondary to one's sexual status, whether an individual were

[130] M. DiGangi, *The Homoerotics of Early Modern Drama* (Michigan: Columbia University, 1994), p.2.
[131] J. J. McNeill, *The Church and The Homosexual* (London: Beacon Press, 2015), p.41.
[132] Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilisation*, p.37.
[133] Di Gangi, *The Homoerotics of Early Modern Drama*, p.2.
[134] D. E. Newton, *Gay and Lesbian Rights: A Reference Handbook* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2009), p.85.

sexually active or chaste, it is this opposition which caused a distinction in medieval society.[135]

In modern societies which display the continued use of effective birth control, such as a modern European culture, sexual intercourse and reproduction are easily separated from one another as the former can be indulged without contemplation of the latter, however in the medieval period the two were entirely connected and inseparable.[136] Sexual intercourse was perceived as a means to an end, this being the birth of a child and therefore when discussed in religious texts, sexual orientation or preference is not a factor of sexual intercourse, rather the reproductive – or non-reproductive – nature of the liaison is the main topic of interest. As means to explanation of this; when medieval texts discuss the female sex drive or the topic of women desiring sexual intercourse, this is most often portrayed not as sexual desire, but as a female desire for offspring.[137] This leads to a certain level of uncertainty regarding the nature of women in medieval texts, considering that the majority of sources from the middle ages are from male authors we cannot guarantee that they are accurately portraying the desires of real women from this period, rather what the male considers a female's appropriate desires to be. Whether or not the average medieval female did desire offspring alone from any sexual relation aside, this still allows us a glimpse into the opinions of this period in regard to sexual activity and what was deemed appropriate.

Over the twelfth-century canon law developed into a more superior systematic discipline, which led to the *Decretum Gratiani* in 1140, the first part of a six piece collection of legal texts later known as the *Corpus Juris Canonici* which were used by the Roman Catholic Church as a moral and legal compass.[138] Canon law such as this exercised punishment for all

[135] Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe,* p.11.
[136] *ibid.,* p.17.
[137] *ibid.*
[138] Bullough, *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality,* p.39.

types of immoral sexual activity, including extramarital fornication, bigamy, rape, incest, prostitution and sodomy with ecclesiastical penalties in church and archdeacons' courts.[139] Foucault discusses the dichotomy of sexual acts and identities, writing 'as defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; as their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them',[140] and discusses the emergence of homosexuality as an identity interchangeable with the term sodomy, it is his opinion that 'homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practise of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny'.[141] This once more links to the way in which sexual identities were formed in the medieval period, as a concept of gender over sexual orientation.

The aforementioned lexical differences between modern and medieval uses of the term sodomy makes the ability to confirm historical figures' homoerotic activity to modern standards difficult, due to the multitude of other sins they could commit under the term sodomy. The lack of historical writing on the subject also factors into the ambiguity of homosexuality as a part of sodomy, presumably due to the embarrassment Chroniclers felt with dealing with such an unmentionable offence in their writing.[142] The purpose of Chronicles was often to entertain, persuade or inform, not to provide explicit details on the sexual orientations and activities of individuals to historians centuries later.[143] Historical texts, therefore, are not faithful and honest representations of concepts such as sexuality, which existed independent of the narratives being written by Chroniclers and therefore evidence from Chronicles on this subject must be taken with an air of scepticism. Their writing, due to the society in which they were raised, reflects their attitudes of sodomy over

[139] J. A. Brundage, *Medieval Canon Law* (London: Routledge: 1995), p. 75.
[140] M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol 1. Translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), p.43.
[141] *ibid.*
[142] Ormrod, 'The Sexualities of Edward II', *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives*, p.35.
[143] Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, p.13.

the nature of sodomitical relationships, the potentially limited understanding of each chronicler would therefore filter through to their writing, lending the text important for comprehending contemporary attitudes but less valuable in regard to reliability.[144]

The matter of chronology plays a large part in the justification of Edward's sodomitical label by modern historians, mainly due to the reality that the earliest documented charge of sodomy against the king comes from the period of the deposition crisis of 1326-7 and therefore is likely to have been propaganda, much like the anal rape narrative of Edward's death.[145] The ideology of Edward as a sodomite grew from the two infamous sermons of Adam of Orleton, Bishop of Hereford given firstly at Oxford in October 1326 and at Wallington in December of the same year.[146] Orleton's sermons were said to have been so severe in their treachery and distain for Edward II that Orleton was accused in 1334 by a Winchester cleric known as John Prickehare of a number of crimes connected to the fall of Edward II, including the motive of Edward as a *tyrannnus et sodomita* (tyrant and sodomite) which Prickehare believed led to the death of the king.[147] Orleton is viewed as having committed treason against Edward II in the form of separating the king from his wife and villainising him. Orleton stated that Edward 'carried a knife in his hose to kill Queen Isabella, and had said that if he had no other weapon he would crush her with his teeth'.[148] It is likely, therefore, that Orleton, who was a known associate of Isabella and Mortimer[149] would have been using his sermons in order to spread anti-Edwardian propaganda, thus

[144] *ibid.*, p.12.
[145] Ormrod, 'The Sexualities of Edward II', *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives*, p.35.
[146] Mortimer, 'Sermons of Sodomy: A Reconsideration of Edward II's Sodomitical Reputation', *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives*, p.49, 51.
[147] *ibid*., p.49.
[148] G. A. Usher, 'The Career of a Political Bishop: Adam De Orleton c.1279 – 1345' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p.46.
[149] *ibid.*

undermining his words as evidence for the sodomitical acts of Edward II and branding his sermons instead a mere rumour.

Orleton was undoubtably conscious of the political ramifications of the accusation of sodomy, especially during the deposition crisis and the moral implications which would turn to distain for Edward II widespread across England, Orleton's two sermons were used, therefore, to undermine the morality and religious authority of the English king.[150] Orleton's sermons and the overtly sexualised manner of Edward's potential death method via the anal rape are the only obvious pieces of evidence for sodomy that comes from the reign of Edward II and can easily be perceived as pieces of fiction for propaganda purposes, all other Chronicles and writings depicting Edward II as a sodomite stem from after his death.[151]

Even the anal rape narrative is not a tale solely associated with Edward II, thus demeaning the accusation of sodomy further. Mortimer and Ormrod both consider the anal rape narrative to be an archetypal vignette dating from the thirteenth-century, concluding that the narrative is seen in relation to other medieval deaths both before and after Edward's.[152] However, where Ormrod seemingly uses this to argue against the accusation of sodomy attached to Edward II and favour the opinion of sodomy as a device of propaganda used against Edward,[153] Mortimer discusses the anal rape narrative as a commentary on the personality of Edward II, suggesting that some basis of sodomy seen by medieval society under the reign of Edward II led to the use of this tale, thus not disproving the possibility of Edward's sodomitical habits.[154]

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[150] Mortimer, 'Sermons of Sodomy: A Reconsideration of Edward II's Sodomitical Reputation', *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives,* p.52.
[151] *ibid.,* p.53.
[152] See: Mortimer, 'Sermons of Sodomy: A Reconsideration of Edward II's Sodomitical Reputation', *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives,* pp.52-3. and Ormrod, 'The Sexualities of Edward II', *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives,* p.36.
[153] Ormrod, 'The Sexualities of Edward II', *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives,* p.36.
[154] Mortimer, 'Sermons of Sodomy: A Reconsideration of Edward II's Sodomitical Reputation', *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives,* p.53.

The bond between men in the medieval period is seemingly different to that of a modern society, thus what historians may see as the erotic nature of many relationships, including those of Edward and his favourites, may not be erotic in a contemporary context.[155]

If one is to accept the opinion that the accusation of sodomy against Edward II is false, despite its prevalence in the modern historical community, it is crucial to explore the reasons why such a rumour could withstand the test of time in such a manner. Mortimer discusses four reasons behind the continued evaluation of Edward's supposed sodomy. Firstly, the 'least-informed element of that spectrum'[156] which follows those who use Edward as a form of historical gay icon to reinforce the validity of homosexuality in society. Secondly, the attempt to understand fourteenth-century identities, specifically homosexual identities, through the use of a prevalent figure such as Edward II. Thirdly, the genuine attempt to use Edward II as a guideline for how sodomy was treated and punished in fourteenth-century England. Finally, he considers a 'narrow band'[157] of authors who are careful not to presume modern concepts such as homosexuality onto figures such as Edward II but value the arguments for sodomy in Edward's court in order to better understand sodomy in his reign.[158]

Though the likelihood that Edward II engaged in sodomitical acts is seemingly low, we cannot rule out the possibility that Edward did engage in sodomitical behaviour and evidence may be found in other sources as rumours of sodomy must have stemmed from somewhere. Chroniclers after the death of Edward II are certain of his sodomitical acts, the *Annales Paulini* states that Edward 'frequented Piers's couch more than the queen's',[159] whereas the *Lanercost Chronicle* uses the trials of the Templars for the crime of sodomy while discussing

[155] Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe,* p.22.
[156] Mortimer, 'Sermons of Sodomy: A Reconsideration of Edward II's Sodomitical Reputation', *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives,* p.48.
[157] *ibid.*
[158] *ibid.*
[159] *Annales Paulini,* translated by H. G. Richardson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1948), p.582.

Edward and Gaveston to insinuate a sodomitical connection between the two, as seen in the Templars, writing that the kings 'brethren… habitually committed sodomy among themselves.'[160]

Accounts surrounding Gaveston's behaviour during the wedding period of Edward II and Isabella of France also depicts his position as a mistress or lover of the king, his status at court was seemingly above that of the king's new bride, thus once more suggesting a romantic or sexual bond between the two men. Gaveston is said to have 'outshone them all [the nobles in attendance] in the splendour of his dress and apparel'.[161] The *Annales Paulini* reads:

Karolus et Lodowicus patrui reginae, cernentes quod rex plus exerceret Petri triclinium quam reginae, cum indignatione ad Franciam remigarunt.[162]

This extract details that the uncles of Isabella of France, upon realising that the king frequented Piers' couch more than the queen's 'returned indignant to the French court.'[163] Edward, during the same coronation, is also said to have been more attentive towards Piers than his new bride, who was merely a child at only twelve years old, another reason behind the uncles' swift departure. [164] Piers Gaveston is also depicted as having worn 'presumptuous attire',[165] an outfit of royal purple where a more appropriate choice would have been golden cloth.[166]

The *Vita Edwardi Secundi,* a chronicle written during Edward's reign also depicts the relationship between Edward II and Piers Gaveston as more than that of friends. Childs

[160] *The Chronicle of Lanercost 1272 – 1346*, p.187.
[161] Geoffrey le Baker, *The Chronicle of Geoffrey le Baker,* p.4.
[162] *Annales Paulini,* translated by H. G. Richardson, p.583.
[163] *ibid.*
[164] Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilisation,* p.373.
[165] *ibid.*
[166] *ibid.*

believes this chronicle to have been written by someone highly educated who shows many signs of maturity in the text, the chronicle also ends abruptly in 1326, insinuating that the author died and did not finish their work.[167] However, Childs rules out the possibility of the chronicle being written by a monk or member of a clerical order, due to the author's disinterest in monastic life during Edward's reign, this perhaps explains the text's willingness to discuss the sodomitical nature of Edward and Gaveston's relationship, due to the lack of religious morality which concerns itself with withholding the sodomitical context of such relations. The chronicle's author describes Gaveston as the 'much loved'[168] chamber officer of Edward during his time as Prince before his father, Edward I, died, then following Edward's succession to the English throne explains that the Barons, who had ever-growing resentment towards Gaveston, could not 'detach the king's affection from Piers, for the more the king heard as they tried to destroy his friendship, the more the king's love increased and his tenderness towards Piers grew… the king had an unswerving love for him.'[169]

The *Vita Edwardi Secundi* is the most prominent and useful text depicting the life of Edward II, especially regarding the potentially homoerotic nature of Edward's relationships with other men due to the comparative nature of its discussion of Edward and Gaveston's bond. Hamilton states that 'there is no question that the king and his favourite were lovers',[170] of which the *Vita Edwardi Secundi* seemingly provides evidence for. The chronicle states that they 'do not remember to have heard that one man so loved another. Jonathan cherished David, Achilles loved Patroclus.'[171] The comparison between these two historical male-male relationships is intriguing due to the different interpretations of such unions, however it is

[167] *Vita Edwardi Secundi: The Life of Edward the Second,* p.xxiv-xxv.
[168] *ibid.,* p.5.
[169] *ibid.,* pp.5, 9.
[170] J. S. Hamilton, *Piers Gaveston, Earl of Cornwall, 1307-1312: Politics and Patronage in the Reign of Edward II* (London: Wayne State University Press, 1998), pp.92-3.
[171] *Vita Edwardi Secundi: The Life of Edward the Second,* p.29.

once more important to pursue investigating such comparisons with the original audience in mind.

The relationship between Jonathan and David refers to the story in the Hebrew Bible, Book of Samuel, and notably connotes a close platonic relationship when under Christian interpretation. However medieval Chroniclers were often noted to be influenced by 'heroic culture'[172] and therefore with the additional context that both Johnathan and David were valiant warriors, we can link the story to that of the ancient world, as a medieval audience would have, thus leading to the homoerotic interpretation of this tale.[173]

Johnathan and David here are also being likened to Achilles and Patroclus, another infamous homoerotic pairing, this time in Greek mythos. Though homosexuality in Ancient Greece was overlooked for many centuries by scholars, the first book to openly investigate Greek sodomy being published in 1978,[174] there is much evidence for homosexuality in this period. Sodomy became the *peccatum non nominandum inter Christianos*, 'the sin not even mentioned among Christians',[175] which makes the comparison of these lovers by medieval chroniclers more intriguing. Greek literature celebrated same-sex relations, believing sex to be a form of unbreakable bond which would have soldiers willing to die for one another on a battlefield, they even implanted homosexuality in their myths and religion, with all but one of their male Olympian gods engaging in some form of sodomy throughout their vast mythology.[176] Achilles and Patroclus are merely one of many popular homoerotic tales in Greek mythology,

[172] Uebel, 'Reviewed Work: Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages by C. A. Lees et al.', *Arthuriana*, p.110.
[173] J. Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), p.136.
[174] Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilisation*, p.1.
[175] *ibid.*
[176] *ibid.*, pp.2-3.

and certainly the overtly sexual nature of their union cannot be overlooked in the medieval period as it often is in Early Modern society.[177]

The author, therefore, is making a clear link between the relationship of Edward and Gaveston and that of two pairings deemed as appropriate and loving sodomitical relationships by Edward II's contemporaries. Despite the sway of modern scholarship, it seems that the most reliable of Chronicles depicting the life of Edward II believe him to have been a sodomite, thus being sexually transgressive, his role in such sexual relations however impacts whether he was also guilty of gender transgressions. Those texts, which do not suggest a homoerotic bond between Edward and Gaveston, are still unable to deny a link between the two and despite presenting the relationship as platonic, the impact of Christian thought can explain the desire to keep the subject of sodomy as unmentionable.

Piers Gaveston's death in 1311 does not signify any sexual connotation in the same nature as that of Edward II and Hugh Despenser's supposed death methods, however accounts of his death still bare reference to the homoerotic nature of Gaveston's relationship to the king. Gaveston, following many exiles at the hands of the Barons and just as many returns to favour thanks to Edward II's adoration of him, was killed by Barons on Blacklow Hill near Warwick after many attempts at seizing him despite the king's protection.[178] Gaveston was beheaded without trial for the offence of 'bewitch[ing] the king's mind'[179]. Though no sexual connotation can be taken from this death, Edward II's potential subordination to Gaveston can be viewed in his reaction to his lover's death and the care he takes of Gaveston's body following his murder. Despite Gaveston's dwindling status in England and his lack of allies in Edward's court, his death did not halt Edward's devotion, instead leading to the king

[177] W. A. Percy, *Pederasty and pedagogy in archaic Greece* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996), p.65.
[178] Geoffrey le Baker, *The Chronicle of Geoffrey le Baker,* p.5.
[179] *ibid.,* p.10.

organising Dominican Friars to rescue Gaveston's mutilated corpse and take him to Oxford, where he would be embalmed and dressed in golden cloth at Edward's command, awaiting burial as Edward arranged for him to be buried on consecrated grounds despite his excommunication by the archbishop of Canterbury.[180] Edward's commitment to Gaveston even after his death depicts the bond the two men shared, regardless of its nature.

To conclude this point, the sexual deviance of Edward II will never be determined with certainty, however there is much consideration for Edward's role as a sodomite, specifically with Piers Gaveston, including the foundation of the anal rape narrative and chronicles depicting the relationship between Edward and his favourites. However, though the possibility that Edward did not engage in sodomitical sexual acts does exist, the constant narrative of homosexuality placed upon Edward's reign reflects societal opinions on Edward and his favourites, the people clearly believing he could be guilty of sodomy, even if in practise he was not.

[180] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, p.249.

Chapter Four: The Extremity of Femininity.

Despite the expectation of subordination, medieval women often used their own femininity to manipulate and encourage situations to their benefit without deploying masculine methods which led to gender transgressions. There are four main ways in which feminine tactics were adopted by medieval women for their own benefit and ensuing power: the use of heirs; status and titles; sexuality and subsequent affairs; and witchcraft.

The role of a medieval woman, especially one of title, status or money, was to marry for political or financial gain for both parties and produce heirs for their husband.[181] Marriage alliances, especially for royal families, depended on both parties benefitting from the arrangement, therefore the title and wealth of young girls were most often evaluated by their fathers or the male figurehead of their family in order to propose a dowry and find advantageous marriages for them.[182] Considering that women while in their youth are exposed to the reality of their worth, it is not surprising that many medieval women then view their status as their personal power and therefore deploy the power given to them through this status as weaponry against their husbands.

The study of women in the subject of medieval politics and power is seldom conducted, this is due to the fact that historical study rarely approaches gender from the perspective of activism in female-centric politics.[183] Considering the lack of archival records and medieval chronicles which display the female perspective it is difficult to place women at the centre of critical enquiry,[184] which in turn hinders scholarly ability to appropriately evaluate the role of women. This fact alone displays the disadvantage of which women faced regarding politics,

[181] B. J. Harris, *English Aristocratic Women, 1450 – 1550: Marriage and Family, Property and Careers* (London: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.3.
[182] *ibid.,* p.4.
[183] Robertson, 'Medieval Feminism in Middle English Studies: A Retrospective', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature,* p.67.
[184] *ibid.,* p.74.

as they were seldom recorded or regarded in literary sources pertaining to these topics, as such it is through the way in which women used men in politics that scholars see a viable link between the actions of women and the outcome of power.

According to Skinner, generations of historians have overlooked or ignored the study of women and gender in their analysis of the medieval period; she proposes a distinction between gender history, women's history and feminist history, which allows for a more concise evaluation of women in the medieval period.[185] Women's history refers to the basic history of women, preferably written by women; feminist history refers to the wider political status of women and their social equality; and gender history is a broader category incorporating the two, 'drawing the lessons learnt from gender inequalities and applying them to wider issues of disempowerment'.[186] This chapter, while focussing on the role of women, falls in the category of gender history, incorporating the topic of women's status in the medieval period while evaluating the basic facts of female life under the reign of Edward II.

The emergence of female-centred historical study is attributed to the increase of anthropological and sociological research related to the role of a woman in culture in the 1970s and 1980s, which led to interest in women within historical periods such as the middle ages.[187] The rise in research focussed on the origins of gender inequality and cultural understanding of women led to the expanding of traditional understanding of power displayed by women in positions of public authority by providing inclusive analysis of the specific tactics deployed by aforementioned females to demonstrate conditions in which female

[185] P. Skinner, *Studying Gender in Medieval Europe: Historical Approaches (*London: Palgrave, 2018), p.14.
[186] *ibid.*, pp.14-15.
[187] M. C. Erler and M. Kowaleski, *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2003), pp.1-2.

power occurred.[188] The subject of female power in history is more commonly discussed under the title of 'female agency' as to differentiate between the tactics of a male in power and a female vying for power and to explore the concept of women using others to integrate control into their lives. Agency feminist theory aims to explain how a woman is able to develop political and social power in male-dominated societies, civilisations which were unlikely to change their attitudes towards women in power due to the way in which cultural norms were assimilated into new generations before they were taught the ability to oppose opinions.[189] As previously discussed, the Medieval period though known as a time of great development, was subject to the legacy of societal norms and the continuation of certain public opinions, including that of gender roles and norms, thus female agency is a subject of great exploration by feminist-centred historians in order to shed light on the tactics medieval women used to grasp as much power as possible. Therefore an exploration into the female-centred powers of the medieval period, whether found in the reign of Edward II or not, are critical to understand the position which medieval women found themselves in.

Status and Titles:

The main way in which the application of female power by women is visible in the medieval period is through the continued use of the status given to those of high standing, most significantly royalty. Royal women were given status and power through their birth thus resulting in politically advantageous marriages throughout royal families in the medieval period and therefore additional status was given to women through marriage. Though this

[188] For examples of anthropological and historical texts pertaining to female culture see the introduction of S. B. Ortner and H. Whitehead, *Sexual Meanings: The Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality (*New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981) and S. B. Ortner, 'Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?', *Woman, Culture, and Society* (San Francisco: Stanford University Press, 1974), pp.67-87.
[189] D. T. Meyers, 'Feminist Theories of Agency', *Britannica*, available at: https://www.britannica.com/topic/philosophical-feminism/Feminist-theories-of-agency (accessed on: 6th April 2022).

status still had women in a subordinate position to their husbands, many medieval women discovered a loophole: their heirs.

Before the discussion of heirs can be explored, first the youth of women in medieval society must be considered, especially the age of consent. In modern western society to sexually abuse children is considered the most heinous of crimes. To counteract this many laws exist in contemporary societies to protect those seen as 'children', in terms of western law we have the label of 'minor', usually an individual under the age of 18; however this concept did not exist in medieval England.[190] The concept of an age of consent in the modern western world applies to that of all sexual acts, however the age of consent in the medieval period referred only to permanent vows, such as marriage and acceptance into religious orders.[191] The age of consent for marriage throughout most of medieval Europe is viewed as the age an individual hits puberty, usually age 12 for girls and 14 for boys, however with the security and privilege given to the male sex throughout this time period it was likely for them to marry even later than that, the average age of marriage for men in both northern and southern Europe being late twenties at some points in the medieval period.[192]

Marriage in the Middle Ages was also a financial deal, with women often being viewed as property, the engagement instead being transactional rather than for love. Women were given a dowry and in earlier society – predominantly the Anglo=Saxon era – a *morgengifu* (the 'morning gift') which was part of the transaction, once again portraying women as the property of a man – first of their father and later of their husband.[193] The notion of women as property of their husbands is seen throughout the medieval period, in law and especially in literature. For example, Gower's fourteenth-century piece, *Confessio Amantis*, portrays the

[190] Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, p.8.
[191] *ibid.*
[192] *ibid.*, p.169.
[193] C. McCarthy, *Marriage in Medieval England: Law, Literature and Practice* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004), p.54.

ownership rights of a husband, depicting the wife's body as his property and another man raping your wife was described as *'robberie'*, specifically viewed as the theft of another man's property.

In the case of queens, the role of a royal woman in parliament also displays the way in which women were viewed by the crown and the men in their lives and how useful they were deemed to be. If the king was absent and a parliamentary meeting was being held, his place would always be taken by his male heir or the next male in line to the throne, despite whether they were of age or not.[194] Instances which counteract this however do exist, most notably in the court of Edward III, who often entrusted his wife Philippa of Hainault with a parliamentary position while he was away, including a meeting of the royal Council in Northampton in 1336 while the king was in Scotland.[195] A series of studies held in the 1990s aimed to revise the research into the roles of queens in parliament and systems of government and though these studies concluded that previous research determining that queens were excluded from formal political meetings were indeed correct, it discovered that women held an informal influence over royal courts and politics between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries.[196] The study evaluated that through a queen's presence in ceremonial court and their position in the royal household, they held influence and status which can be informally recognised in high politics.[197]

A king's wife and mother were also often related to the role of 'negotiator of mercy' on behalf of the royal crown. Strohm and Parsons both discuss how the closest women to the crown were regarded as a personification of judgement and mercy, thus displaying an insight

[194] W. M. Ormrod, *Women and Parliament in Later Medieval England* (New York: Springer International Publishing, 2020), pp.26-27
[195] *ibid.*, p.26.
[196] For further information relating to the 1990s studies see J. C. Parsons, 'Ritual and Symbol in the English Medieval Queenship to 1500', *in Women and Sovereignty*, ed. Louisa O. Fradenburg (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992).
[197] Ormrod, *Women and Parliament in Later Medieval England*, p.27.

into the public opinion of women of the crown.[198] This presentation displays the assumption that royal women would be against harsh punishment and the decisiveness associated with reprimand, favouring a lighter approach of mercy and second chances. As discussed previously, the subordination of women directly ties into their gender role and therefore deviance from this norm resulted in gender transgressions. Therefore, the presentation of a queen eager to punish would be seen as a transgression against the female gender. However, in many cases females used the power they were given as women to their advantage.

Royal women often used the status still associated with their birth family to gain their advantage, over their status granted through marriage. This is visible in the case of Isabella of France. Isabella was married to Edward II when she was 'at most twelve years old',[199] she was effectively sold to the English throne for political advantage, though there were issues surrounding the transaction of her dowry. Philip the Fair, Isabella's father and the King of France at the time of the pair's betrothal, initiated talks with Edward and secured Isabella's dower to be paid to him, rather than Isabella herself, Edward refused to seal such documentation, which led to hostile negotiations between the pair.[200] On 14 May 1308 Edward awarded Isabella the income of the county of Ponthieu and of Montreuil-sur-Mer in order to cover the expenses of her chamber. Edward also sacrificed – albeit temporarily – the presence of his favourite Piers Gaveston at court, agreeing with Philip to exile Piers by 25 June, so that there could be no further complaint from the French king.[201] It was with these

[198] For further analysis of the personification of mercy see P. Strohm, Hochon's Arrow: The Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) and J. C. Parsons, 'Ritual and Symbol in the English Medieval Queenship to 1500', *in Women and Sovereignty,* ed. Louisa O. Fradenburg (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992).
[199] E. A. R. Brown, 'The Political Repercussions of Family Ties in the Early Fourteenth Century: The Marriage of Edward II of England and Isabelle of France' *Speculum* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), p.583.
[200] *ibid.,* pp.583-584.
[201] *ibid.,* p.588.

arrangements established that Isabella of France, merely a child, was married into the English royal family.

However, Isabella used her birth status as princess of France later in her life when she began to have issues with her marriage. Geoffrey le Baker remarks that Isabella '[lamented] that she who was of the royal blood of France… now found herself married to a king who was a miser',[202] and that the Despenser family 'quickly aroused the feminine anger of the queen against themselves.'[203] During this period of personal unrest in Isabella's life, she uses the French royal ties afforded to her at birth in order to begin her plans for separation from Edward and embark on her plot to control England. Although later in her schemes Isabella participates in political savagery and therefore uses means which transgress against her gender, it is the feminine qualities afforded to her which begin her plot to rule England.

Historians often remark on the affection the French throne still held for Isabella even after her marriage to the English king, Castor writes that 'because of his affection for his sister… the French king also agreed to renew the truce'.[204] We also see this pattern in chronicles depicting Edward's reign, including the *Vita Edwardi Secundi* which believes 'since [Isabella] was related by blood to each king, so she seemed likely to be more effective in bringing peace.'[205] Both quotations – the first a modern historian's perspective and the latter a contemporary chronicler's view – refer to Isabella being sent to France by the king of England in order to secure peace between the two countries due to the affection her brother felt towards her. It is during this trip however, that Isabella uses her French influence to rally an army to her cause and begin her attempt to dethrone Edward II and place their son on the throne in his stead. Though there is no irrefutable evidence which suggests that Isabella and

[202] Geoffrey le Baker, *The Chronicle of Geoffrey le Baker,* p.17.
[203] *ibid.,* p.16.
[204] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, p.284.
[205] *Vita Edwardi Secundi: The Life of Edward the Second,* p.229.

her brother King Charles colluded in a plot to bring her son, the prince Edward, to France and secure him the English throne on his return, it is logical to conclude the extreme possibility of such a joint venture.[206] Isabella and Charles had seemingly compatible goals and the deposition of Edward II would benefit them both greatly, allowing Isabella to rule England herself and Charles to have a supportive and friendly tie to the English throne; this is especially significant given the hostility between Charles and Edward. Also, Isabella's feelings of abandonment and being overlooking constantly by her husband would also have likely sprung the French king to action, given his care for his sister and the immediate and unwavering support given to Isabella from Charles would no doubt rally her further to her cause.[207]

Isabella, following the confirmation of her French support, was rumoured to be planning to sail back to England with her son and Edward II's heir alongside a command which the *Lanercost Chronicle* describes as an 'army of France in ships'[208] A public proclamation following this rumour was made stating that if the queen or her son, despite his status as heir to the English throne, were to set foot back in England 'they were to be arrested as enemies of the king and kingdom.'[209] This is a clear example of Isabella using her birth right to gain French backing due to her status in the French royal house, thus making her an enemy of the English throne.

Dismantling the ways in which Isabella betrayed her husband, her king, and the country she married into we can distinguish between the masculine aspects of her actions – Isabella's masculinity will be evaluated in chapter 7 – and the tools she acquires through her femininity which she twists to her advantage without transgressing against her gender. Isabella, as a

[206] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, p.287.
[207] *ibid.*
[208] *The Chronicle of Lanercost 1272 – 1346*, p.250.
[209] *ibid.*

princess of France and the sister to the king of France, is still able to access the political ties of her birth when the need arises, plus her royal status separate to her marriage allows for her safety and protection from the French against the English.

Heirs:

The second way in which medieval women exert power without transgressing from their gender and the societal impact of their sex is through the use of their children as puppets, usually for political and financial gain. As previously discussed, children – especially daughters – were deemed the property of their father until married into another man's care; however there are many cases in history where the mother takes control of their child's life in order to ensure their own political advantage.[210] The role of a medieval mother was to guide her children, essentially grooming them to be successful adults themselves and therefore getting children accustomed to the behaviour, skills and knowledge required in medieval adulthood.[211]

In the case of Isabella of France, it is undeniably clear that Isabella uses her position of mother to the heir of England to her advantage.[212] The use of her children in this way does not allow Isabella to transgress from her gender, as she continues to be successful in her female role as mother; instead, she manipulates this feminine role for gain in fields typically regarded as masculine, such as political prowess.

The first way in which Isabella of France uses her children is through the arranged marriage of her son and the heir to the English throne, the prince Edward – who later is crowned Edward III. The future Edward III, as part of his mother's plan to overthrow her husband and place the prince on the throne in his stead, was promised to one of the daughters of William,

[210] N. Orme, *Medieval Children* (London: Yale University Press, 2003), p.334.
[211] *ibid.*, p.9.
[212] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, p.290.

Count of Hainault.[213] The betrothal of prince Edward to the Count of Hainault's daughter allowed for Isabella to raise an army in the Imperial County of Hainault to march against her husband. This army consisted of roughly 700 men, led by the Count's brother, Jean de Hainault, an army which joined the force of exiles raised by Roger Mortimer to successfully force Edward II from the English throne.[214] This therefore presents how important using heirs to extend political influence was. A marriage alliance between Hainault and England had been proposed six years previously, where Edward was to marry the eldest princess of Hainault which was then overturned by Edward II.[215] Isabella however, being the cousin of Jeanne of Valois, the wife of the Count of Hainault was able to resecure this alliance, this time with the prince to marry a younger daughter, Philippa of Hainault instead.[216]

This is not the only instance of Isabella using the marriages of her children to her political advantage. While ruling England as regent to her son, Isabella agreed to the marriage of her seven-year-old daughter Joan to the son of the Scottish king Robert de Bruce in order to calm the ongoing war between England and Scotland regarding the Scottish right to their own king.[217] It is widely regarded that Edward III did not attend the wedding due to the humiliation he felt about the union and its status at diminishing English rights over Scotland after decades of war over the subject.[218]

Following Isabella's success at placing her son on the throne of England, and following the death of the late king Edward II, Isabella held great control over England in the age of the new king Edward III, using her control over her son to manage the kingdom.[219] The status of

[213] C. J. Rogers, *The Wars of Edward III: Sources and Interpretations* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 1999), p.3.
[214] *ibid.*
[215] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, p.290.
[216] *ibid.*, p.291.
[217] Rogers, *The Wars of Edward III: Sources and Interpretations*, p.21.
[218] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, p.307.
[219] Rogers, *The Wars of Edward III: Sources and Interpretations*, p.267.

'unofficial regent'[220] and mother to an underage king gave Isabella 'legitimacy'[221] to carry out her actions with. It is widely regarded that 'behind the council [of Edward III]… stood Isabella and Mortimer'[222], however there was little to be done due to the aforementioned legitimacy of a mother to the king having political sway. Geoffrey le Baker subtly discusses the influence Isabella has over the young king. Firstly, when describing the coronation of Edward III, le Baker writes that 'there were present as many foreigners as Englishmen, particularly the mercenaries of queen Isabella his mother',[223] referencing the foreign force of Hainault by which Isabella took England. Le Baker also references the titles which were bestowed on Roger Mortimer, the actions of whom will be discussed later in this chapter, writing that 'the three sons of Roger Mortimer and many others were made knights'[224] and 'Roger Mortimer was made earl of the March of Wales'.[225]

Isabella, therefore, despite her masculine intent, is using non-transgressive and feminine methods to achieve her goals, avoiding the title of transgressive female in this way. However, these feminine actions do not overshadow the more masculine tendencies of the queen, thus her label as a transgressive she-wolf is still widely debated, as we will further discuss in Chapter seven.

Sexuality and Affairs:

The third way in which Isabella of France manipulates seemingly feminine characteristics in order to forward her personal political motives is through the affair she has with Roger Mortimer. Though extramarital affairs were common in the Plantagenet dynasty, and as previously seen through the actions of Edward II, commonplace even in royal marriages, the

[220] A. Weir, *Isabella, She Wolf of France, Queen of England* (London: Vintage, 2004), p.258.
[221] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, p.300.
[222] *ibid.*
[223] Geoffrey le Baker, *The Chronicle of Geoffrey le Baker,* p.135.
[224] *ibid.*
[225] *ibid.,* p.137.

toleration and acceptance of female adultery was considerably less favourable than that of male infidelity.[226] The more severe treatment of women's disloyalty was a direct link to the female role as mothers alongside the fear and distrust of female independence which was reflected in medieval society.[227]

The words of Geoffrey le Baker, as presented through Castor's work, argue that Isabella was a 'tyrannical and sexually corrupt queen… abandoning her feminine virtues, to become as cruel and unyielding as iron'.[228] However many see the masculine actions of Isabella as a commentary on the way she was treated, rather than of her own freewill, deeming her as having had her femininity stolen from her.[229] In her youth, Isabella had been the most desired female in all of Europe, only to find herself in a humiliatingly loveless marriage, enduring constant demoralisation at the hands of her husband and his lovers.[230] Warner believes is it the actions of Edward II which removed the queen of her femininity as she was forced to behave in way which were deemed a direct insult to such femininity that she previously possessed, thus leading to the 'evil unfeminine caricature' that Isabella is often portrayed as.[231]

A biblical example of the double standard of affairs comes from the story of King David and Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittie, a general of the king. This case study would have been well known in the Middle Ages, thus rendering it an ideal comparison for medieval thought. After seeing the woman bathe, King David sent messengers for her, convincing her to sleep with him despite knowing she was married to Uriah.[232] Following their tryst,

[226] Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, p.118.
[227] *ibid.*, pp.119, 123.
[228] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, p.303.
[229] R. J. Phillipson, *From Damsel in Distress to Predatory Harlot: Historiography and the Fourtheenth-Century Queen Isabella, 'She-Wolf of France'* (Toronto: The University of Regina, 2015), p.3.
[230] E. Norton, *She-Wolves: The Notorious Queens of England* (Stroud, The History Press, 2008), p.142.
[231] Warner, *Edward II: The Unconventional King*, p.39.
[232] S. M. Koenig, *Isn't This Bathsheba? A Study in Characterization* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2011), p.1.

Bathsheba found herself with child and King David asked Uriah to lay with his wife in order to cover up the adultery.[233] Following the refusal of Uriah, who preferred to remain on his military campaign, King David commanded the troop of which Uriah had joined to battle in the most dangerous area which led to the death of Uriah.[234] King David then married Bathsheba against the advice of the prophet Nathan, who preached against the king's transgressions and the child died as a result.[235] Following the public penance of King David and his repentance, the couple conceived another child, named Solomon, who lived to become a great king.[236]

The point to be made here is that despite the usual case of women receiving more condemnation and criticism than the man for adultery, Bathsheba receives little recorded backlash here, most probably due to her actions being at the command of a king, rather than of her own self-serving desire.[237] However, the sin is clearly being depicted as a crime against Uriah, the taking of his wife followed by the calculation of his death and so despite the male – King David – taking the majority of the guilt, the double standard which places the female as property of her husband to be stolen is visible with this tale.[238]

The story of King David and Bathsheba became popular with Christian bible illustrators, depictions of David spying on a naked Bathsheba can be found in illustrations as far from a fifteenth-century Book of Hours[239] to nineteenth-century art

Fig.2 Jean-Léon-Gérôme's depiction of Bathsheba bathing, being watched by King David.

[233] *ibid.*
[234] Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe,* p.120.
[235] *ibid.*
[236] Koenig, *Isn't This Bathsheba? A Study in Characterization*, p.1.
[237] Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe,* pp.121-122.
[238] *ibid.*, p.122.
[239] *ibid.*, p.120.

such as the work of Jean-Léon-Gérôme in figure 2. The story was well known throughout the Christendom for centuries, therefore individuals in the Plantagenet Dynasty would have been versed in the punishment of adultery and the warning message conveyed in this tale.

During the reign of Edward II, Isabella of France began her own affair with the thirty-eight-year-old soldier, baron and politician Roger Mortimer.[240] Isabella and Mortimer had encountered one another many times in the court of Edward II and Mortimer was an obvious ally to Isabella due to his military prowess,[241] he – in theory – had nothing to lose and everything to gain by aiding Isabella in her plot to depose Edward II and to place her son on the throne, promising power, wealth and status to Mortimer in return for his allegiance.[242] There is a continued academic reference to Roger Mortimer as the lover of Isabella of France, Weir refers to constantly to Mortimer as the 'lover' of Isabella,[243] and Norton specifically states that Mortimer became the lover of the English Queen.[244] Though texts such as these are confident in their portrayal of Mortimer and Isabella as lovers, there is decisively little evidence to document the private lives of the pair and therefore confirm this.[245]

Mortimer, despite his looks being unknown, was in his thirties and a well-documented fighter, therefore likely of athletic build, Isabella at the time was thirty and still renowned as a famous beauty of Europe therefore physical attraction between the pair is not unlikely.[246] The two also shared many goals and political interests, Isabella was also widely distinguished for her intelligence and so conversation would have flowed between the pair.[247] Thirdly, Mortimer and Isabella were both caught up in a high-stakes play for power, with the

[240] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, p.288.
[241] Mortimer is known for many military battles, including his conflict with the de Lacys in 1308 and his appointment as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland by Edward II in 1316.
[242] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, p.288.
[243] Weir, *Isabella: She-Wolf of France, Queen of England*, pp. 197, 303, 319.
[244] Norton, *She-Wolves: The Notorious Queens of England*, p.136.
[245] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, p.288.
[246] *ibid.*
[247] Mortimer: The Greatest Traitor GBooks p.36

aphrodisiac qualities of such temptation, plus the forceful and combustible temperaments of the two it is easy to assume an extramarital affair could have sparked.[248] This is the extent of the information historians have on the pairing, however, there are two further key aspects of Isabella which led to the widespread belief of the infamous affair of Isabella and Mortimer.

The first of these comes from the chronicle of Geoffrey le Baker, who depicts Isabella as an adulterer. Though le Baker does not mention Isabella by name Castor believes he makes wordplay while making reference to the biblical tale of Jezebel, the Phoenician princess and worshipper of Baal.[249] Barber comments that 'there is a wordplay on "Jezebel" and "Isabella", though Baker does not actually name her in this passage.'[250] Castor also followed his line of thought, stating that 'for Baker, Isabella was Jezebel – a tyrannical and sexually corrupt queen manipulating her husband and son to impose evil on the kingdom.'[251]

Though Isabella as a sexually manipulative figure would suggest her use of feminine values to pursue her masculine intent of political power, the exposing of Isabella as a Jezebel figure by le Baker, however, does further suggest that there was indeed an affair between Isabella and Mortimer. The supposed affair between the queen and her ally was believed even by chroniclers contemporary to the deposition of Edward II and not just an overtly fantasised modern interpretation of a mere political alliance between two intelligent and power hungry figures.

The final suggestion of affair between Isabella and Mortimer stems from the way in which Isabella presented herself in the period between her betrayal of Edward II and his public capture and deposition. Isabella in this time presented herself a widow, despite her husband

[248] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, p.288.
[249] Geoffrey le Baker, *The Chronicle of Geoffrey le Baker,* p.21.
[250] *ibid.*
[251] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, p.303.

still being alive.[252] Isabella is said to have openly styled herself as a widow, claiming that she had lost her husband due to the relationship he held with Hugh Despenser.[253] She is also at this time recorded as publicly announcing:

> Someone has come between my husband and myself, trying to break this bond. I protest that I will not return until this intruder has been removed but, discarding my marriage garment, I shall assume the robes of widowhood and mourning until I am avenged of this Pharisee.[254]

The public styling of herself as widow is seemingly a political move with the agender of placing Isabella publicly as the wronged party in this matrimonial war, however Mortimer made his first public appearance beside Isabella around the same time, thus linking the public declaration of Isabella's broken loyalty to her husband and the appearance of Mortimer as her ally.[255] The act of styling herself as a widow stated that in both personal and political terms her husband was dead to her, therefore her duty lay solely with her son who as an underage heir she had the right to speak on behalf of.[256]

In a letter to Isabella's uncle Charles of Valois from Edward II, dated 18 March 1326, Edward displays knowledge of the full extent of Isabella's deceit.[257] Edward in this letter places the sole blame for his wife's treachery on the advice of Roger Mortimer of Wigmore, accusing the queen of treason by following the advice of a traitor to the king.[258] He also in his discussion of Isabella and Mortimer accuses the queen of sexual misconduct with her advisor, he uses the phrase 'in and out of house'[259] which many believe is a diplomatic approach to

[252] *ibid.*, p.289.
[253] Doherty, *Isabella and the Strange death of Edward II*, p.51.
[254] *Chroniques de London*, edited by C. J. Aungier (London: Camden Society, 1844), p.49.
[255] Doherty, *Isabella and the Strange death of Edward II*, p.52.
[256] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, p.290.
[257] Doherty, *Isabella and the Strange death of Edward II*, p.54.
[258] *Calendar of Close Rolls 1323-1327 preserved in the Public Record Office*, p.579.
[259] *ibid.*

the modern phrase ‘in bed and out of bed’, therefore portraying Edward’s belief that Mortimer serves Isabella’s personal needs as well as her political ones.[260]

Though Isabella made the decision to publicly announce her separation from her husband and present her alliance with Mortimer in a way which had England questioning the nature of their partnership, Doherty believes this was a risky choice.[261] Isabella was renowned for her intelligence, however her status with Mortimer threatened to paint her as a scarlet woman, a sinful adulteress who did not deserve the support of the English people, adultery for a queen was both a sin and treason.[262] However, it was seemingly Isabella’s self-presentation as the innocent party in the dissolution of her marriage, as a wronged queen with no freedom or responsibility and a royal mother who cared for the widely loved prince Edward which took precedence over the knowledge of her potential infidelity and treacherous rebellion against her husband and king.[263]

Isabella, in presenting herself as the victim of infidelity, despite her own potential affair, is an example of femininity and womanly prowess being used to the effect of gaining power without obvious transgression into stereotypical masculine qualities. The effective use of affairs could perhaps be the deciding factor in the ongoing struggle between Edward II and Isabella of France, leading to the crowning of Edward III and therefore Isabella’s plot being realised.

[260] Doherty, *Isabella and the Strange death of Edward II,* p.54.
[261] ibid.
[262] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, pp.288-290.
[263] *ibid.,* p.292.

Witchcraft:

Though witchcraft is something which Isabella was never seriously accused of, it is an interesting point of comparison for the treatment of women acting in manipulative ways for selfish gain, while avoiding transgressing from their femininity due to the societal links between women and witchcraft in the later Middle Ages. For many women, witchcraft was an opportunity to claim some power for themselves, for others the accusation of witchcraft would have ended their lives and thus was an undesirable quality.

In the early Middle Ages, people feared magic in the same way that they feared all other sacred ritual, the fear of the unknown paired with overwhelming power which could strengthen and sever relationships between individuals, be used to cause and cure sicknesses and death and which could spread good and evil amongst society was a terrifying prospect in medieval society, especially to those less educated.[264] Though this feared power could be used for good and for evil, normative Christian practice of rituals which aimed to use such power for good were excluded from the narrative of magic, thus displaying ritual as a transgression from holy Christian ceremony, 'magic' therefore was the term given to inappropriate sacred ritual.[265]

In both Christian and Jewish tradition, women were often portrayed in literature as sorceresses and enchantresses who seduced men, the use of erotic magic in literature was aimed to be a portrayal which lay just outside of the realm of possibility, as to not strike fear in men, however this was not always entirely successful.[266] Isabella, in her aforementioned female tactics of manipulation, notably her affair with Mortimer, present her in the light of a

[264] Davies, *The Oxford Illustrated History of Witchcraft and Magic*, p.29.
[265] *ibid.*
[266] Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, p.161.

seductress. Due to Isabella's success in her plans, however, she is never accused of witchcraft, seemingly she did not have to use such intense methods for her desired outcome.

Due to tales of magic such as that of the Arthurian legend of Merlin, magic in men was less feared of that in women, leading to approximately two-thirds of those facing condemnation for witchcraft between 1300 and 1500 being female, a fraction that had grown significantly over the centuries.[267] This is due to the positive and helpful depiction of male sorcerers such as Merlin, as men trusted other men with power over a woman. A version of the tale of Merlin can be found by cleric Geoffrey of Monmouth,[268] Geoffrey's interpretation of the legends of King Arthur and Merlin were in fact so popular that other Arthurian tales are labelled as either 'pre-Galfridian' or 'post-Galfridian', depending on whether the version had been influenced by Geoffrey's or not.[269]

Fig.3 Frederick Sandys. A Depiction of Morgan le Fay.

Tolhurst discusses the feminism within Geoffrey's texts – specifically *Vita Merlini* and the presence of strong female figures of magic in the text.[270] These prominent figures are that of a female prophet and the infamous character of Morgan le Fay who becomes one of the most significant individuals of Arthurian legend, later known by other names such as Morgana or Morgante.[271] Feminism is a modern

[267] *ibid.*, p.162.
[268] His works depicting Merlin include *Prophetiae Merlini* (Prophecies of Merlin) and *Vita Merlini* (Life of Merlin).
[269] Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, edited by M. D. Reeve, translated by N. Wright (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007), p.vii.
[270] F. Tolhurst, *Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Feminist Origins of Arthurian Legend* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p.2.
[271] *ibid.*

concept reserved for modern people, not to label authors in hindsight, however the progressive depiction of women in Geoffrey's work cannot be overlooked.[272] Medieval women threatened men in many ways, especially in regard to sexuality. Women may be temptresses placed to lure men to the life of sin, they could be transgressive and usurp a man's power through their masculine actions, adultery could lead to misplaced heirs and pre-marital childbirth – in short, women through their feminine powers could control men.[273]

Geoffrey of Monmouth's portrayal of women as sorceresses and figures of manipulative and dangerous magic still panders to the male viewpoint of sinful women despite what is deemed as proto-feminist due to his inclusion of undertones which portray the failures of men rather than indulging in the villianisation of women as many other contemporary texts do.[274] Geoffrey of Monmouth's telling is seemingly flexible in its opinion of gender roles and therefore transgression from such roles, however Geoffrey is the exception not the rule.[275] Early translations of Geoffrey's texts redact certain parts, including that of positive female interpretation, meaning that early scholars of his work were not accustomed to his treatment of women,[276] however Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote in the twelfth-century, meaning that Edward II and the society of which he ruled over may have been accustomed to the original work with positive feminine interpretation. This, however, is purely theoretical and research into the effects of Geoffrey of Monmouth's work in the centuries after his death is scarce, therefore it is improbable to hypothesise the effect Geoffrey's work had regarding opinion of women in the reign of Edward II, not men.

The link between witchcraft and female power is pertinent to this discussion as the accusation of witchcraft seemingly falls somewhere between women who are not transgressing against

[272] *ibid.*, p.12.
[273] Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, p.161.
[274] Tolhurst, *Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Feminist Origins of Arthurian Legend*, p.12.
[275] *ibid.*
[276] *ibid.*

their gender and those who are. Those accused of witchcraft in the medieval period are individuals who act in self-serving ways, or who are not following the appropriate course of life for themselves, whether that be due to gender or social status, however they are not outwardly transgressing their gender to the extent of full social isolation.[277] This is even more true for royalty, as witchcraft is an accusation which befalls many queens who are not considered to be full transgressors of their gender, such as Elizabeth Woodville and Anne Boleyn however the accusation of witchcraft in lower social standings is sometimes viewed as a full transgression.[278]

Those of low social standing, or less powerful women than that of Isabella of France, a queen and a princess in her own right with money, status and land, were not given the same treatment as royalty for their transgressions.[279] Misogyny is present throughout the majority of medieval discussion of witchcraft and women highly condemned for situations out of their control. Medieval women were often coerced into situations, through no fault of their own which could lead to backlash and accusation against them, however the act of making choices for themselves despite whether such choice was appropriate or not could also land them in condemnation as a sinful woman.[280] To put it simply: women were damned if they did, and damned if they didn't. Isabella, due to her royal status and her successful plan to become regent, was in a significant place of power, the most powerful woman in England, therefore accusation of witchcraft or of any wrongdoing would be a considerable act of treason.

Women in the medieval period were allowed to appropriately fall into three categories of sexuality: virgin, widow or wife, the transgression against these was deemed as sinful sexuality and thus due to the correlation in medieval literature and teaching between female

[277] B. Levack, *The Witchcraft Sourcebook* (London: Routledge,2004), p.1.
[278] *ibid.*
[279] Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, p.163.
[280] *ibid.*, p.164.

sexual transgressions and witchcraft, women who transgressed in such a way, who could not protect themselves, were often labelled as witches.[281] Early medieval sermons condemned magic and urged both men and women to stay on holy paths, detailing some of the inappropriate ways in which one could be linked to unholy rituals, these included the use of unorthodox words, being linked with objects such as amulets and even physical activities including picking herbs.[282]

A text written by two German Dominican friars dated as pre-1487, is a script which discusses anti-witch tradition and discusses the sexual instability of women and therefore their threat level to men, promoting misogyny to its audience.[283] It discusses the reasons why women were far more likely to engage in the art of witchcraft than men, stating that:

> They are more credulous; and since the chief aim of the devil is to corrupt faith, therefore he rather attacks them... women are naturally more impressionable, and more ready to receive the influence of a disembodied spirit... they are feebler both in mind and body... she is more carnal than a man, as is clear from her many carnal abominations... we find that nearly all the kingdoms of the world have been overthrown by women... as she is a liar by nature, so in her speech she stings while she delights us.... All witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable. ...these women satisfy their filthy lusts not only in themselves, but even in the mighty ones of the age, of whatever state and condition; causing by all sorts of witchcraft the death of their souls through the excessive infatuation of carnal love.[284]

Alongside discussing the likelihood of each gender engaging in the art of witchcraft, this text also tells many stories of peoples' encounters with witches and sorcerers, thus identifying some of the fears medieval society had regarding witches in their communities. These anecdotes included demons in female form known as *succubi* who seduced human men to collect their semen, which they could then use to impregnate human women, stating the

[281] *ibid.*
[282] Davies, *The Oxford Illustrated History of Witchcraft and Magic*, p.30.
[283] Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, p.162.
[284] H. Krämer and J. Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, translated by M.Summers (New York: Dover, 1971), pp.43-8.

victims of this were 'perverted by witchcraft'.[285] This tale displays the feminine power of sexuality and affairs in its most extreme rendition, thus presenting witchcraft as when female control goes too far. This text also tells tales of, another [286] Medieval men already feared women as castrators and therefore the inclusion of tales such as witches who harmed men by putting them under a spell which made them believe she had removed their genitalia, making them follow a set of instructions to try to find them once more, may have been used to ease the building fear men held towards women.[287] The anecdote for this tale reads as follows:

> For a certain man tells that, when he had lost his member, he approached a known witch to ask her to restore it to him. She told the afflicted man to climb a certain tree and that he might take which he liked out of a nest in which there were several members. And when he tried to take a big one, the witch said: You must not take that one; adding, because it belonged to a parish priest.[288]

The humour of such tales did little however to ease fear of witchcraft and to distance magic from reality, as the church began witch hunts and the concern of medieval people for their own safety rose. The church, nor critics of witches, did not concern themselves with the factual practises of those who did study aspects of what became known as 'witchcraft', which was the use of natural resources and energies from the cosmos, such as herbs, stones and stars instead assumed links between witchcraft and the devil.[289] Instead they believed that witches had sexual intercourse with the devil and the devil's assistants and to encourage young women to follow in their path, fornicating with the 'devil' while he was visible to only the witch and invisible to those who did not practise such dark arts.[290]

The continued condemnation of witchcraft in the medieval period displays the basis of which men felt genuine fear of powerful women, even while using powers that did not label them as

[285] *ibid.*, p.25.
[286] Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, p.162.
[287] *ibid.*, p.163.
[288] Krämer and Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, pp. 58, 121.
[289] Davies, *The Oxford Illustrated History of Witchcraft and Magic*, p.30.
[290] Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, p.163.

transgressive, masculine figures. Through the denunciation of female centric powers such as magic and witchcraft, women who display any form of power were portrayed as unnatural by the Church, thus leading to any demonstration of power causing alarm to medieval men.[291] Throughout the medieval period the Church represented and swayed the opinions and thoughts of the medieval people, which in turn would profoundly affect the everyday lives of medieval men and women, leading to events such as witch trials and the continued fear of females in power.[292]

Since almost all evidence of female power and sexuality come from sources which were written by men, in particular men of the Church for whom the lack of chastity of women presented a threat to their own vows,[293] we only know how the continuous witch hunt affected men in the medieval period and can only assume the affects this had on the status of women in the same period. Though Isabella, due to her successes in gaining power and her royal status through feminine means, is never accused of witchcraft, the presence of such negative connotations and accusations in the face of extreme uses of feminine power present the difficulty with which women acted for their own gain under, being damned for feminine power and – as shall be discussed in chapter seven – damned for using masculinity for power also.

[291] *ibid.,* p.164.
[292] *ibid.*
[293] *ibid.*

Part Two: Medieval Masculinity and the Female Transgression.

'It was to kings, not queens, that Tudor sovereigns looked for example and warning.'[294]

- Helen Castor.

Fig. 4. Unknown.

15th Century manuscript illustration depicting Isabella of France and Roger Mortimer with their army.

[294] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, p.33.

Chapter Five: The Stereotypical Male.

Male superiority can be seen in many ways in the modern world, both overtly and regularly discussed to subject matters the public is kept more in the dark from. We often hear about the inequality in the gender pay gap in the modern United States of America, where women are reported to earn 82 cents to every dollar made by a man, according to American business magazine Forbes in 2021.[295]

Another example of this is the conviction rate of rape crimes against women perpetrated by men, according to 2005 statistics only 15% of victims report sexual violence to the police and of those instances reported only 5.7% of cases end in a conviction for the perpetrator.[296]

Thirdly, a barely discussed issue of male superiority displayed in the subordination of women can be seen in the millions of cases of female genital mutilation that still occur in over thirty different countries, mostly concentrated in the Middle East and Africa but also prevalent in the immigrant population of Western Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand.[297] In 2019 it was estimated that 200 million girls and women still alive had experienced some form of female genital mutilation according to the United Nations and for a variety of reasons, though many are linked to the inferiority of women to men, including the effect of keeping women virginial ready for marriage and for purposes of enhancing male pleasure.[298]

Male superiority, therefore, is an issue still prevalent in modern society and one that the individuals of a medieval society would also be familiar with, the severity of such therefore

[295] T. Spiggle, 'The Gender Pay Gap: Why It's Still Here', *Forbes*, available at: https://www.forbes.com/sites/tomspiggle/2021/05/25/the-gender-pay-gap-why-its-still-here/?sh=3445f53d7baf (accessed on: 21st August 2021).
[296] Rape Crisis England and Wales, *Statistics- Sexual Violence*, available at: https://rapecrisis.org.uk/get-informed/about-sexual-violence/statistics-sexual-violence/ (accessed on: 21st August 2021).
[297] E. Ontiveros, 'What is FGM, Where Does it Happen and Why?', *BBC News*, available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-47131052 (accessed on: 22nd August 2021).
[298] *ibid.*

presents superiority as a defining characteristic of masculinity, in direct contrast – as per the gender binary – to the inferiority and subordination of women.

The concept of masculinity is often viewed as the defining quality of men, leading to men of all generations feeling the weight of manliness and conforming to the standard set by the society they live within. However, throughout history the intricate details of what is and is not deemed to be part of masculinity has changed significantly and the male traits standardised in historical societies rarely matches the standards of the modern world we as historians were born into.[299] As previously discussed, the binary in which gender is frequently studied has maleness defined in strict opposition and relation to femaleness. The way, therefore, that a medieval society evaluates an individual's masculinity is not in comparison to his male companions and other men of his time but instead to how unlike the female identity he portrays himself.[300] Sodomy therefore effects the usefulness of this binary, a male who engages in sodomitical acts cannot be evaluated for his masculinity as he cannot fit the masculine identity if he has the same sexual preference as an appropriately behaved female, despite his potentially male characteristics otherwise.

The concept of gender identity in the Middle Ages is, as we have already discovered, in strict correlation to the genitalia one is born with, physiological and anatomical differences in human bodies therefore the defining factor of gender to medieval society.[301] These physical principles are those which we still use today and stem from the classical period, these concepts of gender have therefore extended from the ancient Greeks into the Christian doctrine of the medieval period to the medical system of our modern society.[302]

[299] Uebel, 'Reviewed Work: Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages by C. A. Lees et al.', *Arthuriana*, p.110.
[300] *ibid.*
[301] C. Lees et al, *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p.31.
[302] *ibid.*

With the continuation of ideologies such as these anatomical and physiological traits of gender, it is not beyond reason for one to carry further gender-based knowledge through these time periods and therefore the ancient world can tell us a lot about how masculinity was defined in the Middle Ages.[303] The Greek philosopher Aristotle, who is often deemed to have fathered science alongside philosophy, was at the forefront of discussion of gender differences in ancient Greece, not only debating the basic concept of anatomy and its correlation to gender but also the innate superiority of men over women.[304] We can safely assume that this is a concept visible and known in the Middle Ages and that medieval men were treated as superior to women, another ancient tradition of gender still effecting medieval lives. This is relevant to the conversation here due to the transferrable idea of status from gender, by linking the historical argument to modern perspectives witnessed by twenty-first-century individuals the leap to inequality due to gender identity in the Middle Ages may not seem so severe.

Modern perspectives understand that gender is a social construct, rather than the direct equivalent to one's genitalia, however Hadley explores the need to think in terms of masculinit*ies* and femininit*ies* rather than them being considered as two singular categories.[305] This implores for the exploration of men and women as singular identities rather than studying a gender in its entirety while also investigating everyone in their given historical context.[306]

As previously explored in this research, Edward II seems to align himself with the female identity, due to his perceived sexual preferences. However, the complexity of gender tends to fall outside of the gender binary, therefore it may be possible for Edward II to display

[303] Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilisation*, p.373.
[304] Lees et al, *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, p.31.
[305] D. Hadley, *Masculinity in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Routledge, 1998), p.1.
[306] ibid., p.2.

masculine gender qualities despite his transgressive sexuality. There are many cases which argue against the gender binary and for the allowance of differentiation between gender and sexuality, a notable example which coincides with the Plantagenet Dynasty being the Knights Templar, which we have previously in Chapter Two seen links between the Holy Order and Edward II.

The Knights Templar were a Catholic military order founded in 1120 who were favoured throughout the Christendom. [307] Templar knights were notable for their red cross mantles and their fighting skills throughout the crusades, however as high as 90% of Templar members were non-combatant, making up the large economic infrastructure of the charity.[308] According to the *Lanercost Chronicle,* around the same time that Edward II was dealing with increasing resentment towards Piers Gaveston in his court and therefore the growing hatred towards sodomy in royal courts, the Knights Templar were battling their own sodomitical accusations. The Chronicle states that:

> the Master of the Order of the Templars, with many brethren of his order, publicly confessed… [before] the King of France and the clergy and people, that for sixty years and more he and his brethren had… habitually committed sodomy among themselves.[309]

Considering that there is little evidence to support this accusation it is undetermined whether the Templars were in fact sodomites, however they were a large and significant power of their time, targeted by many who wanted to destroy their power – therefore, the accusation of sodomy may be no more than a rumour for purpose of deformation. The fact that sodomy was used to warp perspective against the Templars is enough to clearly evaluate a link

[307] A. Gilmour-Bryson, 'Sodomy and the Knights Templar.' *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, vol. 7, no. 2, (Houston: University of Texas Press, 1996), p.154.
[308] S. Martin, *The Knights Templar: The History and Myths of the Legendary Military Order* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2005), p.47.
[309] *The Chronicle of Lanercost 1272 – 1346,* pp.187-188.

between public opinion and sodomy, the mere accusation of such acts could evidently take down a corporation as large and powerful as the Templars, therefore public opinion must have been extremely negative towards sodomitical acts.

However, the Knights Templar is an order well known for its masculine qualities, such as superiority over other military personal, their victory rate, ability to fight and economical skillset. Their legacy precedes them as most modern individuals, even those with little to no historical knowledge, will have heard of the Knights Templar. This is displayed through the constant revival of Templar television series and movies, all which depict the crusades and other military style aspects of the Knights Templar, most recently Netflix bought the 2017 series 'Knightfall' which follows the Knights Templar in the early fourteenth-century but also older renditions such as 'Blood of the Templars' a 2004, Austrian movie. Once again, this example bridges the gap between intense historical evaluation and the everyday modern perspective, as the masculinity of the Templars is explored by historians, filmmakers and theatre enjoyers alike. The Knights Templar are consistently and continuously depicted as the peak of masculinity, however their sodomitical acts are in direct violation of that according to the gender binary. The *Lanercost Chronicle* specifies that those in the Knights Templar who were accused as having engaged in sodomitical acts were 'apprehended and imprisoned'[310] as well as 'tried upon the aforementioned crimes with which they were charged by inquisitors sent by [the pope].'[311] However, despite the accusation and subsequent confession of sodomy, the Templars maintained their roles as military power and international bankers.[312]

The masculine qualities of the Knights Templar therefore mask the presence of sodomy in their ranks, the military successes and failures of the Templars surrounding the Crusades

[310] *The Chronicle of Lanercost 1272 – 1346*, p.188.
[311] *ibid.*, p.193.
[312] Gilmour-Bryson, 'Sodomy and the Knights Templar.' *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, p.155.

being their main point of remembrance for centuries to come.[313] Therefore, it is seemingly possible to be viewed as sexually transgressive – as seen in the sodomy accusations against the Templars which were spread by chroniclers – while maintaining the perspective of masculinity. This however is seemingly not the case for Edward II as his sodomitical acts overshadow any other potentially masculine qualities, the overarching conclusion leaning towards Edward II and as completely transgressive individual. This therefore lends the question of why Edward II's sodomy could not be overlooked in the same way that the Templars' was.

A common fact of the reign of Edward II was the blatant dislike towards the king and many of the ways he chose to rule. Crompton blames this hatred on the presence of persuasive favourites like Piers Gaveston and Hugh Despenser the Younger, their animosity stemming from the sodomy presented in Edward II. However, the possibility remains that the blame lying with Edward's sodomy may be an excuse to dislike the king for other reasons. Edward is often described as being 'led astray by favourites'[314] who made Edward abandon his ability to make clear-sighted decisions, lending him incapable of making decisions for the greater good of England.[315]

Following some of Edward's acts, Pope John XXII wrote to rebuke the king, he then specified that such act was taken not for the sexual sins of Edward but for 'such plebeian pursuits'[316], these pursuits potentially referencing the arts of rowing and driving chariots and the craftmanship Edward indulged in during his youth.[317] These hobbies, despite seeming appropriate for a young male in the Plantagenet era, were deemed as inappropriate for

[313] *ibid.*
[314] Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilisation,* p.371.
[315] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth,* p.235.
[316] Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilisation,* p.373.
[317] *ibid.,* p.372.

Edward II, though this may be a commentary more on the expectation of Edward as the future king, a point evaluated further in chapter six.

Crompton notes that with this depiction of Edward II, the sodomitical acts are seemingly less significant, as the king seems 'more like a Wyoming rancher than an Oscar Wilde, more a Louis XIII than a Henry III',[318] essentially rendering Edward II as a figure not of traditional kingly qualities – hence perhaps the hatred bred within the English nobility – but also not as a figure of transgression against his masculine gender as both Wilde and Henry III were known as extravagant sodomites.

The next logical question in this discussion therefore must be as follows: does Edward II transgress against his gender? This answer of course will depend on whether one can dislodge their thinking from the constraints of the gender binary, as all who that heterosexuality is a concept of masculinity will not be able to deduce Edward as a purely masculine. However, for those who can put the potential sexual acts of the king to the side temporarily will find that there is much debate to be held here.

During Edward's youth, before his ascension to the throne, he was deemed a relatively masculine figure, even with his fondness for his companion Piers Gaveston. King Edward I, Edward's father and predecessor is often portrayed to have been aware of the relationship between his son and the Gascon knight, making exceptions for the pair's bond, which Prestwich connotes to have been 'almost certainly'[319] of a homosexual nature. Edward I was in fact the one to introduce the future Edward II to Gaveston, they had met in 1298 when Edward was fourteen and Piers roughly a year older, the king choosing Gaveston as a model companion for his heir.[320]

[318] *ibid.*, p.373.
[319] M. Prestwich, *Edward I* (London: Yale University Press, 2008), p.552.
[320] Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilisation*, p.372.

The late king Edward I was often described as a successful and masculine Plantagenet king, despite the issues he faced against the forces of Robert the Bruce in Scotland. Edward I in fact is deemed to be one of the most authentic examples - alongside Edward III and Henry V - of co-operation and understanding between royalty and the king's greatest subjects.[321] The character of Edward I is often closely linked to his reign, often deemed as a formidable figure. He was a physically impressive man, with much experience and knowledge, he also held a reputation for having a fierce temper, one which few subjects were brave enough to stand up against.[322] An example of such temper comes from 1295, when the dean of St Paul's approached Edward I in hopes of protesting against the rise in taxation of the clergy, the dean is said to have died on the spot of fright after barely beginning his speech.[323] The sheer presence of Edward I presents himself as an authority figure, superior to most and thus a successful and non-transgressive male. This is in complete contrast to his son; the 'inept'[324] Edward II.

In the youth of Edward II, being a prince and heir in England, his hobbies and virtues are recorded to have been nothing like that of his father.[325] Despite the overlooked nature of the relationship between Edward and Gaveston and Edward I's desire to model Edward II after himself, this plan fell short, Edward II not mustering the same warrior-like, masculine essence that his father before him possessed.[326] According to the *Lanercost Chronicle*, when Edward II's claim to the throne was challenged by an outsider claiming to be the rightful king, many of the English people chose to readily support the other man 'because the said

[321] A. M. Spencer, *Nobility and Kingship in Medieval Europe* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p.3.
[322] M. Prestwich, *Plantagenet England 1225-1360* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), p.177.
[323] *ibid.*
[324] Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilisation*, p.372.
[325] *ibid.*
[326] *The Chronicle of Lanercost 1272 – 1346*, p.270.

Lord Edward resemble the elder lord Edward in none of his virtues.'[327] In comparison of the two kings, the *Lanercost Chronicle* writes:

> For it was commonly reported that he [Edward II] had devoted himself privately from his youth to the arts of rowing and driving chariots, digging pits and roofing houses; also that he wrought as a craftsman with his boon companions by night, and at other mechanical arts, besides other vanities and frivolities wherein it doth not become a king's son to busy himself.[328]

Through this depiction of Edward II we can see that chroniclers did not associate the masculinity of Edward I with his successor, instead Edward II as a prince was described as almost fanciful and subject only to his own whims. The *Lanercost Chronicle* is however infamously against Edward II, this may be due to have far north Lanercost is, near to the border of Scotland which could have affected the opinions of the clergy there, who may have been tired of the war. This is certainly a reason for the chronicle's hostility towards Edward II. Though this passage indicates that we cannot assign the traditional masculinity required of a king to Edward II, none of these characteristics are heavily associated with womanhood, therefore the English king is not portrayed as truly transgressive to his gender.

Under the reign of his father, the prince Edward was responsible for many of the armies led against the 'usurper' Robert the Bruce. One of these armies sent by Edward I had 'his son aforesaid (whom he had knighted in London together with three hundred others)',[329] the prince Edward was also left as regent of England while Edward I went on military campaigns in Flanders against King Philip IV of France, which led to the peace treaty in which Edward was promised to Isabella of France.[330] These are merely two of many battles in which Edward I and the future Edward II fought side by side, presenting the prince Edward as a capable

[327] *ibid.*
[328] *ibid.*
[329] *ibid.*, p.177.
[330] S. Phillips, *Edward II*. (London: Yale University Press, 2011), pp.78-79.

masculine figure in all ways except his potential love affair with Piers Gaveston, Edward – both with and on behalf of his father – is also attributed with the siege of Caerlaverock Castle, the 1301 Scottish campaign and the conducting of negotiations with rebel Scottish leaders in 1304.[331]

Ranulph Higden's *Polychronicon* lists Edward II as 'most inconsistent in behaviour'[332], an explanation perhaps to how difficult to pinpoint the characteristics of Edward II are, we have seen Edward working in harmony with his father while he was the prince, however such agreement between the two Edward's was not consistent. In 1305 the two quarrelled, a dispute said to have been bought about over the issue of money, the prince Edward is said to have had an altercation with Bishop Walter Langton, the royal treasurer regarding the amount of financial support the prince received.[333] Following this incident, the king defended Bishop Langton over prince Edward, banishing his son and his companions from the royal court and putting a stop to all financial support.[334] The two reconciled shortly after, thanks to the negotiations held by family and friends to the pair,[335] however the younger Edward was still regularly portrayed as an unpredictable and inept man, as per the *Polychronicon:*

> King Edward was..., if common opinion is to be believed, most inconsistent in behaviour. For, shunning the company of nobles, he sought the society of jesters, singers, actors, carriage-drivers, diggers, oarsmen, sailors and the practitioners of other kinds of mechanical arts. He indulged in drink, betrayed confidences lightly, struck out at those standing near him for little reason and followed the counsel of others rather than his own. He was extravagant in his gifts, splendid in entertainment, ready in speech but inconsistent in action. He was unlucky against his enemies, violent with members of his household, and ardently loved one of his familiars, whom he sustained above all, enriched, preferred and honoured.[336]

[331] *ibid.,* pp.88-95.
[332] Ranulf Hidgen, *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden*, translated by J. R. Lumby (London: Cambridge Library Collection, 1886), p.39.
[333] Phillips, *Edward II*, p.105.
[334] *ibid.,* p.96.
[335] *ibid.,* p.107.
[336] Ranulf Hidgen, *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden*, pp.39-40.

The medieval period was a dominant culture with a patriarchal nature as seen in the presentation of stereotyped gender during this time.[337] A failure to conform to kind, therefore, in the words of Ormrod, was 'sometimes observed or articulated as a decline from the masculine to the feminine',[338] and it was assumed that 'men who did not do what men ought to do were not, in fact, true men'.[339] The inconsistency of Edward II, therefore, paired with even the most minor of transgression would render the king labelled as transgressive for life. Since sodomy was the ultimate sin against the laws of nature in the eyes of the medieval Church, it was used as a marker for sin and the defiance of the natural order, hence its close correlation to the theme of gender.[340] Despite the intrusion of the gender binary, the rumour of sodomy surrounding Edward II was already too severe to balance the afflictions against his gender, the complex and wavering actions of his youth only added to the king's demise and status as a transgressive male.

[337] Ormrod, 'The Sexualities of Edward II', *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives,* p.30.
[338] *ibid.*
[339] *ibid.*
[340] *ibid.,* p.31.

Chapter Six: The Standard of Kingship and Gender.

Thus far in this exploration of transgressions, the topic of gender has been standardised widespread across the genders, discussing transgressive behaviour as if the same is anticipated of a knight as it is a village blacksmith. However, the possibility remains that the expectation of royalty is different to that of a non-royal. Masculinity was evidently expected in a king, as we have witnessed the standard of which Edward II was demanded to maintain, however the lines between transgressive and not are seemingly blurred in many places for a king, and often stricter for them over others.

Edward II is often viewed as a 'defective'[341] king, in the fourteenth-century there was an effort made to present Edward as being outside of 'normative behaviour'[342] and though this effort appeals specifically to his gender transgressions, this attempt was particularly invested in the presentation of Edward as not displaying the characteristics of a normative king.[343] As discussed in Chapter Five, Edward II is often held to the standard of his father, Edward I, who was known as a competent king, reforming the royal administration and improving common law as well as fighting against the independence of Scotland.[344] Edward however is often seen in direct opposition to the examples set by his father. Edward I as a prince defeated his own father's enemy Simon de Montfort in the Battle of Evesham in 1265 during the Second Barons; War, despite earlier in the war siding against his father, thus making him a well-respected man in the eyes of contemporaries and historians alike for fighting with his own father King Henry III.[345] According to the *Vita,* Edward II 'did not fulfil his father's

[341] Ormrod, 'The Sexualities of Edward II', *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives,* p.27.
[342] *ibid.,* p.28
[343] *ibid.*
[344] Prestwich, Michael (1997). *Edward I* (Yale ed.). New Haven, US: Yale University Press p.63
[345] *ibid.*

ambition, but turned his mind to other things' [346], showing no interest in the continuation of his father's war against Robert the Bruce.[347]

According to contemporary sources to Edward II's reign, the characteristics displayed by the king were:

> His excessive love for some and unbridled cruelty to others; his tendency on the one hand to idleness and indolence and on the other to exacting physical exercise; his general debauchery and licentiousness; his preference for low-life company; his enthusiasm for aquatic sports; and his engagement in the rustic arts, specifically those of hedging and ditching.[348]

To summarise, Edward II was presented by Chroniclers 'as a man who flouted the established norms of kingly behaviour, courtly protocol and chivalric values'[349], known for his eccentric and outlandish ways. The sexual transgressions of Edward II are also viewed as deviant behaviour to Chroniclers, this deviancy rendering Edward as unworthy of a royal title.[350]

Edward, however, was not the first of England's kings to display the sexual transgressions which led to cause for concern regarding Edward's crown. William Rufus was the son and successor to William the Conqueror.[351] He did not marry, nor is there any evidence to suggest he sired illegitimate children during his reign, monastic chroniclers from the time also mocked his 'foppish dress, his louche habits and his irreligiosity'.[352] Despite this, the judgement of William Rufus lay outside of his gender and sexual transgressions, his stature as king was instead deemed through his military prowess and judgement as a soldier.[353]

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[346] *Vita Edwardi Secundi: The Life of Edward the Second,* p.5.
[347] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, p.236.
[348] Ormrod, 'The Sexualities of Edward II', *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives,* p.28.
[349] *ibid.*
[350] *ibid.*
[351] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, p.231.
[352] *ibid.*
[353] *ibid.,* pp.231-232.

Though many believe William Rufus may have indulged in the vice of sodomy,[354] the allegation of such seems to be minimal due to his other kingly successes, therefore the accusation of sodomitical acts is not the defining characteristic of his kingship.

Though many scholars tend to blame the rumour of a sodomitical relationship between Edward II and Gaveston as the cause of Edward's insufficient leadership, it seems that the relationship itself is not the issue, but the consequence of it.[355] It was said that during matters of state, the kings mind would be preoccupied and Edward incapable of maintaining his concentration on subjects of war and government.[356] Instead, Edward would be preoccupied by his favourite – Piers Gaveston – and therefore when anyone else was in the room, Edward's attention would still remain on Gaveston, rendering the king incapable of conducting a conversation with anyone else at court.[357]

The presence of Gaveston at court left the barons at odds, the English nobles saw the king's favourite as their enemy due to the incapability the king faced while Gaveston was around, this dislike went as far as the barons refusing to be without a weapon in Edward's court, stating to a messenger that 'as long as their chief enemy, who had set the kingdom and themselves in uproar, was skulking in the king's chamber, their approach would not be safe.'[358] Gaveston did not help the situation, often riling up the barons, one of his favourite ways to do so by giving them all undesirable nicknames;[359] The Earl of Gloucester was called 'Horessone', an insult mostly used towards men to insinuate they are the son of a prostitute[360]

[354] See: F. Barlow, *William Rufus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008) p.212 and M. Kuefler, *The Boswell Thesis: Essays on Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p.195.
[355] Ormrod, 'The Sexualities of Edward II', *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives,* p.33.
[356] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, p.231.
[357] *ibid*, p.232.
[358] *Vita Edwardi Secundi: The Life of Edward the Second,* p.19.
[359] *ibid.,* p.17.
[360] *The Brut or The Chronicles of England*, edited by F. W. Brie (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübler, and Company, 1977), pp.206-207.

and The Earl of Warwick is known as the 'Dog'.[361] These actions made Gaveston more hated than he was before and the barons desperate for some power returned to them.

Edward's inadequacy as a king due to his preoccupation and the anger towards Gaveston's place in court came to fruition through the creation of the Ordinances. In February of 1310, the barons came together to demand action be taken against the failing reign of Edward II. However, Edward was not blind to this consequence and had already sent his favourite, Gaveston, away for his safety.[362] The outcome of this meeting was the appointment of a collective of twenty-one lords who would determine the estate of England, the Ordainers infamously ruled England on Edward's behalf for the next eighteen months.[363] Edward had no choice but to give into their demands, despite the requirement that Gaveston be removed from the king's company and exiling him from England.[364] The *Vita Edwardi Secundi* states that 'The earls undoubtedly wanted Piers to leave England, so that he should no longer remain intimate with the king'.[365] The *Lanercost Chronicle* depicts the specifics of this request, stating that:

> Piers Gaveston should depart from the soil of England within fifteen days… never to return, nor should he thereafter be styled nor be an earl, nor be admitted to any country which might be under the king's dominion; and sentence of excommunication was solemnly pronounced by the Archbishop of Canterbury.[366]

The rest of these Ordinances concerned themselves with Edward's government, especially the way in which he delt with money, specifically how he took currency from his subjects and how he spent aforementioned coin.[367] What was seemingly unclear to Edward that that the Ordinances were concerned with his public duty as the King of England, not with his private

[361] *Vita Edwardi Secundi: The Life of Edward the Second,* p.16.
[362] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth,* p.238.
[363] *ibid.,* p.239.
[364] *Vita Edwardi Secundi: The Life of Edward the Second,* p.xxiii.
[365] *ibid.,* p.13.
[366] *The Chronicle of Lanercost 1272 – 1346,* pp.193-194.
[367] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth,* p.240.

affairs, the only private matter discussed in the Ordinances in fact being the relationship between Edward II and Piers Gaveston.[368]

Despite the ordinance which declared Piers Gaveston should remain in exile, Edward still plotted to have his lover restored to him. In order to have Gaveston returned, Edward would have to go against the Ordinances and in order to soften this treachery he would do everything else the barons had requested of him, while dealing with the consequences of Gaveston being labelled as an enemy of the 'king' and the kingdom upon his return to England.[369] Upon realising Gaveston had re-entered the country, five earls plotted against him: Thomas, earl of Lancaster; Aymer, earl of Pembroke; Humphrey, earl of Hereford; Edmund, earl of Arundel; and Guy, earl of Warwick. The earls surrounded themselves with an army and captured Piers Gaveston.[370] The *Vita* reads that 'he whom Piers called Warwick the Dog has now bound Piers with his chains.'[371] The capture of Gaveston eventually led to his murder at the hands of the earls, the *Flores Historiarum* reading:

> Et cito post, videlicet xiii kal. Julii, sicut meruit, ordinatores regni et pacis eum fecerunt apud Gaveresik juxta Gaverestone decollari; cujus corpus ductum fuit Oxoniæ ad domum fratrum Prædicatorum.[372]

This text specifies that the 'Ordainers of the kingdom of peace'[373] decapitated Gaveston and his body was drawn to the friars of Oxford.[374] Castor argues about the justification of this murder, many stating that for the Ordinances to allow for lethal force to be used against a man who not only served England, but was also dear to the king could not be lawful, as king Edward himself did not justify the death.[375] Due to the sealed documents signed by the earls,

[368] *ibid.*, p.241.
[369] *ibid.*, p.246.
[370] *Vita Edwardi Secundi: The Life of Edward the Second,* p.41.
[371] *ibid.*, p.45.
[372] *Flores Historiarum* (Paris: H. M. Stat. Off, 1890), p.336.
[373] *ibid.*
[374] *ibid.*
[375] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth,* p.247.

promising one another safety and protection from any repercussions surrounding the death of Gaveston, Edward was at a loss attempting to find justice for Gaveston's execution.[376]

The repercussions of such act do not concern the topic of kingship, instead the real consequences come from the apparent desperation of the earls to resort to such extreme measures in the hope that the distraction Gaveston caused at court would disappear, allowing Edward to resume his kingly duties to the appropriate level. Seemingly, the distractive and transgressive nature of Edward II's reign were significant in the Middle Ages, and one may conclude that he was therefore an anomaly, however, the transgressive actions of a king which drives their closest companions to drastic and unlawful measures to repair is not a topic first seen in Edward II's reign.

The use of ancient comparisons is vital for the discussions of the characteristics of medieval royalty due to the emphasis primary texts put on the ancient traditions. This is evident in chronicles as while discussing the wars of Edward's reign there are many comparisons between royalty of the Plantagenet dynasty and ancient Greco-Roman figures, including to Aeneas, father of the Romans.[377] When discussing Robert the Bruce in his wars with both Edward I and II, the *Vita Edwardi Secundi reads*: 'here was another Aeneas fleeing alone from the Trojan captivity, Aeneas' fame, but for his crimes, he might have won; by evil deeds his honour was undone.'[378] Robins concludes that the presence of ancient stories and mythologies in medieval texts displays the desire of context and culture and provides clues of the medieval mindset, thus portraying the importance of using ancient context in medieval literature as an insight into the medieval perspective.[379] With the importance of this in mind, opportunities arise to evaluate other well-known ancient tales that were present in the lives of

[376] *ibid.*, p.248.
[377] Virgil, *The Aeneid* (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), p.iii.
[378] *Vita Edwardi Secundi: The Life of Edward the Second,* p.25.
[379] W.R., Robins, *Ancient Romance and Medieval Literary Genres: Apollonius of Tyre* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1995), p.iii.

the medieval people and use aforementioned context of these stories to provide basis for the medieval standpoint.

The view that gender and sexual transgressions equal transgressions from the societal norm, perpetrates the concept that a 'perfect' king and queen for each society not only exists but is expected, thus labelling seemingly non-transgressive royalty as 'perfect'. However, can transgressions be considered as an anomaly if they date back as far as the ancient mythology of Greece? The concept of a royal family torn through betrayal due to transgressions against what their society deems the norm is not a new tale told by Edward II and Isabella of France, in fact it seemingly rings true amongst many tales throughout history, even dating back to the Ancient Greek oral tradition and the story of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, a tale which the Plantagenet royals were familiar with.

The tale of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra starts with the Trojan war, where Agamemnon, King of Mycenae, left to support his brother Menelaus in the battle. Before leaving, Agamemnon and his soldiers offended the Goddess Artemis by accidently killing one of her stags while hunting. In order to appease the goddess, Agamemnon kills and sacrifices his eldest daughter Iphigenia at Aulius – an act that while appeasing Artemis, infuriates his wife Clytemnestra.[380] While away, Clytemnestra undertakes an affair with her husband's cousin, Aegisthos and the pair conspire to kill Agamemnon on his return from Troy.[381] Upon his return, Clytemnestra undertook her plot with Aegisthos to murder the king.[382]

Revenge is taken against Clytemnestra and Aegisthos many years later by Orestes and Elektra, the son and daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra. In the play *The Oresteia* by

[380] D. Leeming, *The Oxford Companion to World Mythology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.5.
[381] *ibid.*
[382] *ibid.*

Aeschylus we are given the stage direction *'Aegisthus lies dead'*[383] and witness the murder of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus at the hands of her son.[384]

The format for this ancient tale can be seen repeated in the reign of Edward II, leading to his ultimate demise. Within this comparison, Edward II takes the place of Agamemnon, who has angered his wife through his sexual transgressions, Isabella of France is Clytemnestra, the wronged wife who plots to betray and kill her husband and king and Roger Mortimer is Aegisthos, the one who betrays his king to aid in the murder plot. We can also draw comparison with the characters of Orestes and Edward III as the family member who seeks to avenge the father's demise.

The characteristics of kings which lead their closest allies to traitorous ways is therefore not an anomaly seen only in Edward II's reign. With this format other infamous royal betrayals can be seen to follow the same format, for example Edward IV during the War of the Roses. Unlike Agamemnon, Edward IV is not betrayed by his wife, rather by those sworn to protect him, the Richard Neville, 16th Earl of Warwick who was his closest companion since childhood and his brother George Plantagenet, the Duke of Clarence.[385] The betrayal plotted by the two is to usurp the Yorkist throne of Edward IV and place George upon it instead,[386] the catalyst of this being their dislike for Edward IV's wife, Elizabeth Woodville, who was accused of witchcraft.[387] The avenger of Edward IV, who can be compared with the Orestes figure in the ancient tale, is fulfilled by Richard III of England, the youngest of the three York brothers, who ultimately takes the throne (albeit with some betrayal of his own against

[383] Aeschylus, *The Oresteia* (London: Penguin Classics, 1977), p.76.
[384] *ibid.*, p.78.
[385] M. Hicks, *Warwick the Kingmaker* (London: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), p.1.
[386] *ibid.*
[387] *ibid.*

the sons of Edward IV), keeping the throne York opposed to the Lancastrian alliance Warwick and George were entertaining.[388]

As seen through the use of ancient literacy comparison to the actions and behaviours of medieval society, individuals of the Middle Ages would be familiar with Greco-Roman myths. Thus, the usage of such comparisons may be used to issue warning to its contemporary society, displaying that no-one – not even the king – is above the repercussions of their own transgressions.

Though it is tempting to label the presentation of Edward II as an anomaly to history, plagued by betrayals faced by none other, it is clear to see that he is not alone in the act of transgressing against those closest to him. With this in mind: Is there any such thing as a non-transgressive king? With this example Edward II has gone from a singular case to being part of a collective of kings, including Edward IV.

Despite how insufficient Edward II is viewed as a king, his successor Edward III was known as a successful and non-transgressive king. Edward III was said to have inherited the intelligence of his mother however also developed the political vision of the future of England which was lacking in both of his parents. He is also credited as understanding that the power of a king lay not in the tyranny that one could spread, but rather the fair law of a land and in loyalty over fear.[389] Edward III, for all his successes was given the epithet 'the flower of kings past, the pattern for kings to come'.[390] This epithet, despite portraying Edward III as the ideal by which kings should be held to, also suggests that this ideal is

[388] J. Ashdown-Hill, *The Third Plantagenet: George, Duke of Clarence, Richard III's Brother* (London: The History Press, 2014), p.136.
[389] *ibid.*, p.313.
[390] *Ibid.*, pp.313-4.

unobtainable, or at least difficult to reach, as suggested through the term 'pattern', insinuating that to be a successful king, one must follow Edward III's every action.

Edward III also had his own mistakes, most of which tallied up with those of his father. Like Edward II, he was also indifferent to the older nobility at court, preferring the company of his small group of companions, as chosen by him and led by William Montague, his closest friend.[391] Edward III also had his own series of military disasters in his early years, though soon learning that the military power of England did not serve his own desire for glory, but instead the long-term needs of England.[392] However, Edward III does not get labelled by historians negatively due to these mistakes, unlike his father before him, which is a curious concept.

The first reason behind this could be that the later and more successful actions of Edward III overshadowed his earlier insufficiencies as king. Unlike Edward II, Edward III grew in character and began to make better choices for the good of England as his reign continued, whereas Edward II seemingly made more poor choices with every passing year.

Secondly, it is possibly that it is the sexual transgressions of Edward II painted him in a negative light, a scandal which Edward III never fell prey to. Edward III, unlike his predecessor, had a successful and content marriage with Philippa of Hainault, who was an ideal and quiet queen who gave the king ample heirs. The accomplishments of Edward III in his many kingly characteristics, such as the successful marriage alliance and producing of heirs and his later military campaigns alongside his long and bountiful reign seemingly overshadow any mistakes or transgressions the king could have made. The standard of king is, therefore, different to the standard of man.

[391] W. M. 'Ormrod, Edward III and His Family', *Journal of British Studies* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p.401.
[392] *ibid.*

Even in the case of Edward II his transgressions seemed to lessen during his son's reign. Philippa of Hainault would take pilgrimages to the tomb of the late king Edward II thus shining a more positive light on the late king; from these visits, the queen essentially fostered a cult dedicated to Edward II, his tomb becoming almost a saint's shrine to them.[393] Later, in the reign of Edward II's great-grandson Richard II, a campaign was launched to have Edward II canonised, in 1395 a document of Edward's miracles was sent to Boniface IX, though the canonisation attempt of Edward II was denied.[394] Though the transgressions of Edward were forgotten by the royalty of the reigns of Edward's ancestors, the church did not forget and – according to Thomas de Burton – Richard's request to give his ancestor a sainthood was denied due to the fact that 'King Edward himself delighted excessively in the vice of sodomy… and all his reign was devoid of good fortune and blessings.'[395]

It is concludable that the standard of kingship was valued higher than that of masculinity, despite the two being mostly overlapping in characteristics. However, the impact of the gender transgressions in a king seemingly does not maintain any steady structure throughout history. We can see that the consequences alter depending on other factors of the reign, therefore though Edward II was not alone in his being singled out for his transgressions, he was seemingly more severely reprimanded for them. Thus, though the concept of kingship exists separately to masculinity, the 'perfect' king is non-existent and instead the standard of masculinity far more obtainable.

[393] Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilisation*, p.375.
[394] *ibid.*
[395] *ibid.*, p. 376.

Chapter Seven: The Art of the She-Wolf.

As discussed previously in Chapter Five, the conceptual ideas relating to masculinity were the defining qualities for men in the Middle Ages and an ideal to live up to. In women however, the presence of masculine qualities signified transgressive behaviour and were an impression of their downfall. Although critical enquiry surrounding the characteristics and roles of women in history is often lacking, the exploration of transgressive women in history – for example those acting in accordance to the traits associated with masculinity – have been more concentrated on when researching historical women.[396] Newer historical study focusses more greatly on the grey areas of gender, significantly those who transgress against the norm, whereas previous literature pertaining to the history of women evaluated gender through the gender binary, just as we have explored in the subject of masculinity.[397]

When discussing the concept of masculinity in women, many pieces of scholarship tend to create an ethos of negativity towards these transgressive women, displaying them as violating their duties and roles, however, more recently there has been a move towards focussing on the disobedience of medieval women through the eyes of femininity, thus presenting these women as fierce and admirable. Considering that archival records of women are written by men, historians usually present medieval women through the male gaze, thus feeding into the misogyny of historical texts.[398] Geoffrey le Baker presents Isabella as a *ferrea virago,*[399] a woman who imitated a man, 'abandoning her feminine virtues'.[400] The appearance of

[396] Robertson, 'Medieval Feminism in Middle English Studies: A Retrospective', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature,* p.67.
[397] The text 'Medieval Feminism in Middle English Studies: A Retrospective', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* discusses the issue of the gender binary in opposition to the new age research of gender in the medieval period, as discussed in this chapter.
[398] Robertson, 'Medieval Feminism in Middle English Studies: A Retrospective', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature,* p.75.
[399] Geoffrey le Baker, *The Chronicle of Geoffrey le Baker,* p.20.
[400] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth,* p.303.

Isabella as such counteracts the presentation of her as a sinful female, displaying her as a transgressive woman instead.

Fig.5 The Capitoline Wolf. Unknown.

The term 'she-wolf' was coined to describe transgressive women in the Middle Ages, a blanket term first used by Castor which specifically targeted four strong female figures of the medieval period who were said to have 'ruled' England before the kingdom saw its first female monarch.[401] The origins of the term 'she-wolf' however date back to the Roman story of twins Romulus and Remus, once again displaying the significance of evaluating the examples set by the ancient world. The myth of Romulus and Remus is one of a few contrasting stories dictating the founding of Rome, the legend depicts the twins as being rescued and raised by the she-wolf Lupa, following their grandfather King Numitor being overthrown by his own brother.[402] The earliest evidence for the she-wolf mother comes from the first half of the forth-century B.C.E, where depicted on a stele in Bologna is a child suckling from the she-wolf,[403] however the most famous depiction is the Capitoline Wolf (see figure 5). The Capitoline Wolf is a bronze statue depicting the she-wolf suckling Romulus and Remus, for centuries the statue was believed to be a fifth century B.C.E Etruscan work, with the twins being a later edition in the late fifteenth-century A.D though many debate this now stating that the wolf herself is an eleventh or twelfth-century A.D work. [404] This statue

[401] *ibid.*, p.i.
[402] C. Mazzoni, *She-Wolf: The Story of a Roman Icon* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.3.
[403] P.M.W. Tennant, *Lupercalia and The Romulus and Remus Legend* (South Africa: Classical Association of South Africa, 1988), p.81.
[404] Tennant, *Lupercalia and The Romulus and Remus Legend*, p.4.

has become one of the most recognisable images of ancient mythology, presenting a she-wolf as a fierce protector and mother.

Considering the positive connotations of the she-wolf in ancient mythology, where the animal is presented as maternal and protective, the origins of the she-wolf as a negative term are questionable. The image of the she-wolf suckling Romulus and Remus is still a significant image worldwide, presenting motherhood and new beginnings, she is visible in many coats of arms, including that of Codogno, Lombardy and Cluj County in Romania, as well as being sculpted and painted throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance period.[405]

The negativity of presenting transgressive women as she-wolves therefore is a point of view specific to one historical era. Mortimer in his review describes Castor's work – which is one of the first instances of branding queens as she-wolves – as being 'Tudor-centric' despite there being little reference to the Tudor period.[406] Mortimer presents the negative connotations of the she-wolf as an indicator of the changing social positions of women in the Tudor era and of a personal preference of Castor to ignore historiography which evaluates women as the masculinity they possess over the femininity they lack, thus transforming the iconography of the she-wolf from a positive display of female power, such as that explored in Chapter Four, to a negative one due to the incessive focus on masculinity in strong women.[407]

One of these four transgressive queens described by Castor is Isabella of France, who is said to have been the third she-wolf of the English monarchy after Empress Matilda and Eleanor of Aquitaine, and followed by Margaret of Anjou.[408] These four women are infamous for their battles for the English throne though all with their own individual circumstances and

[405] *ibid.*
[406] I. Mortimer, 'She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth by Helen Castor – Review', *The Guardian*, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/nov/06/she-wolves-helen-castor-review (accessed on: 14th April 2022).
[407] *ibid.*
[408] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, p.i.

outcomes, and though these women share many characteristics – namely typically masculine traits which led to them being branded as she-wolves – they are all unique in their own right. Before the transgressions of Isabella of France can be adequately explored it is important to first examine the three other women as to build a character profile of the she- wolf.

England has seen many queens with mild transgressions, including Elizabeth Woodville who was regularly accused of witchcraft, even as severe as necromancy (or 'nigromancy' as it was previously called)[409] and presented herself often in a strong and masculine nature. However, these four queens are the only ones who are universally agreed to be she-wolves,[410] therefore understanding the women that are labelled as such alongside Isabella, and who came before her, can provide insight into the severity of Isabella's transgressions.

For Empress Matilda, daughter of Henry I of England, her claim to the English throne caused her greatest battle. Following the death of Henry I's only male heir, William Aedlin in the White Ship disaster of 1120, the king was left with a crisis of succession considering the male primogeniture culture of English monarchy.[411] Despite his attempts, Henry I did not sire any further legitimate children, therefore he named his daughter Matilda as his successor, having his court and the nobles swear an oath of loyalty to Matilda and her successors.[412] This decision, however, was not popular amongst the court therefore when Henry I died in 1135 Matilda and her husband Geoffrey faced severe opposition from the Anglo-Norman court of the time, leading to Matilda's cousin Stephen of Blois taking the English throne for himself with the complete backing of the English church.[413] By the summer of 1139 Empress Matilda

[409] G. Hollman, *Royal Witches from Joan of Arc to Elizabeth Woodville* (Cheltenham: The History Press, 2019), p.2.
[410] See E. Norton, S*he Wolves: The Notorious Queens of England* and H. Castor, *She Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth* for more on this.
[411] J. Bradbury, *Stephen and Matilda: The Civil War of 1139–53* (Stroud: The History Press 2009), p.1.
[412] E. King, *King Stephen* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), p.38-39.
[413] *ibid.*, p.39.

was launching full invasions in an attempt to claim the throne that had been stolen from her which only ended after two decades of civil war when King Stephen agreed to name Matilda's son Henry as his heir in 1154. Despite her efforts, Matilda had to settle for her son Henry II ascension to the throne, rather than becoming England's first female monarch herself, which if had of occurred would undoubtedly have changed the course of the English monarchy forever.[414]

The implications of the actions of Empress Matilda are accurately inscribed on her grave: 'Great by birth, greater by marriage, greatest in her offspring.'[415] Matilda was the first documented medieval female to question the norm of male inheritance for kingship, a question within the English monarchy that would not be asked again for four hundred years, she presented masculine qualities in war, ambition and status and despite being ultimately unsuccessful in her goal, her success in raising Henry FitzEmpress, the future Henry II, and his success upon the English throne would stand as testament to her authority in power.[416]

Eleanor of Aquitaine's story is more similar to that of Isabella of France's, where queens turn against their own husbands; for Eleanor however there was conflict in both of her two marriages to European kings. Eleanor, after becoming the duchess of Aquitaine following her father's death in 1137, was first married to Louis, son of King Louis VI of France who had sworn to be her guardian in the wake of her father's death.[417] Louis quickly succeeded his father as King of France, merely days after his marriage to Eleanor and the two attempted to settle into married life, having two daughters together despite Eleanor's apparent dislike of her husband and his weaker nature.[418] Eleanor attempted to annul the marriage between herself and Louis on the grounds of them being too closely related, however the church

[414] Bradbury, *Stephen and Matilda: The Civil War of 1139–53,* p.187.
[415] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, p.126.
[416] *ibid.*
[417] *ibid.*, p.131.
[418] A. Weir, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: By The Wrath of God, Queen of England* (London: Vintage, 2007), p.13.

continued to deny her request until Louis asked on her behalf, understanding that Eleanor would not allow him to sire another child with her and therefore leave him with no male heir and therefore the annulment of their marriage being in his best interest as king of France.[419] Usually historians see that the royal women who have sons are the ones who hold the power, however for Eleanor the opposite was true, for if she had borne Louis sons the annulment of their marriage would have been impossible.[420]

Following her escape from France and leaving her daughters behind, Eleanor married the future Henry II, son of Empress Matilda, despite three issues: them being more closely related than herself and Louis; Henry's succession to the throne not fully secure yet; and rumours of an affair between Eleanor and Henry's father Geoffrey V, Count of Anjou.[421] Together, Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine sired many children, including two of the most notable and well-known kings in English monarchy, the celebrated Richard the Lionheart and the infamous King John but more crucially it was their eldest son, known as Henry the Younger was the cause of Eleanor's downfall. Henry II faced many disagreements with his sons, leading to revolts and battles for power between them, of which Eleanor supported her offspring, aiming for regency or status as king's mother over her current role as a subordinate queen, one of the most significant of these being the Revolt of 1173 – 1174 which led to Eleanor's capture.[422]

Eleanor was imprisoned by Henry II between 1173 and 1189, held in many castles across England until the death of her husband and the ascension of Richard I to the English throne following Henry the Younger's death six years before his fathers. One of Richard's first acts

[419] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, p.155.
[420] *ibid.*
[421] B. Wheeler, and J. C. Parsons, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Lord and Lady* (New York: Springler Publishing, 2016), p.269.
[422] William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum, Book II Chapter 7*, available at: https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/williamofnewburgh-two.asp#7 (accessed on: 26th September 2021).

as king was to have his mother released and due to his commitments to the crusades, Eleanor ruled England in his stead, naming herself 'Eleanor, by the grace of God, Queen of England'.[423] Eleanor outlived her son Richard, continuing her influence upon the English throne with her son King John, supporting his claim to the throne over that of her grandson, Arthur of Brittany, who was the child of Eleanor's elder and deceased son Geoffrey.[424]

Like Isabella of France, Eleanor of Aquitaine is known for her influence and power via the use of regency of her sons, however as discussed previously in this research the specific use of this power is innately feminine as it concerns the nature of motherhood. The intent behind the actions of both women however is evidently masculine. Eleanor uses her power and influence to progress herself politically, such as aligning herself with England for her second marriage, with seemingly little concern over the status of others in her life, even leaving her daughters with her first husband Louis in France as they could not be used to politically benefit her. Like her mother-in-law Matilda, Eleanor displays political prowess and military authority, as well as crippling ambition.

Although there are evident similarities in the attitudes of the two she-wolves who came before Isabella, the inherent nature of being a she-wolf is usually described merely as masculine behaviour. As previously stated, many other royal females display the traits of being politically minded and authoritative when trusted to guide England while their king is away, many queens are also known to use underhand tactics such as witchcraft for political gain and wrongfully guide their kings however they do not earn the epithet of 'she-wolf'. The link which ties these women together under this title is their defiance of their husbands or the male authority in their life as well as rebellion against their king. Empress Matilda battles King Stephen, Eleanor of Aquitaine against both Louis VII of France and Henry II of

[423] Weir, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: By The Wrath of God, Queen of England*, p.128.
[424] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, p.211.

England and Isabella against Edward II. In contrast, Elizabeth Woodville, who seemingly displays more specific characteristics of a masculine woman only ever transgresses for the benefit of her husband and king Edward IV and never against him. The transgressive nature of she-wolves, therefore, is not necessarily the masculinity in which their actions lie but their undertaking of the superiority that comes with masculinity and their rejection of the subordination of femininity.

The final undisputed she-wolf is Margaret of Anjou, wife of Henry VI of England. At first glance, Margaret seemingly disproves the aforementioned hypothesis as her actions are often, at least in the beginning, in her husband's name. Margaret married her husband King Henry VI of England at only fifteen years old, him being twenty-three at the time and shortly after on 30 May 1445 she was crowned Queen of England at Westminster Abbey.[425] Henry VI inherited England during the long-running Hundred Years' War and is the only English monarch to also be crowned King of France, though his uncle Charles VII contested this French claim and historians such as Wolffe discount it as rulership.[426] Throughout his reign, as well as during the period during the War of the Roses when he lost the throne to Edward IV, Henry VI suffered with mental illness which led to Margaret acting as king on his behalf.[427] Margaret as the Lancastrian's English Queen spent her reign furthering support for the Lancastrian claim to the throne, securing alliances and commanding military battles,[428] thus acting fully in the king's stead not merely as regent and usurping him by claiming his power as her own.

Though Margaret at first fought for her husband's claim to throne, similarly to that of her Yorkist counterpart Elizabeth Woodville, she soon gave birth to her son Edward and like

[425] M. L. Kekewich, *The Good King: René of Anjou and Fifteenth Century Europe* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p.101.
[426] B. P. Wolffe, *Henry VI* (London: Yale University Press, 2001), p.26.
[427] *ibid.*, p.18.
[428] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, p.337.

Isabella of France before her, faced the dilemma of power through regency.[429] The birth of Edward was the turning point for Margaret, leading her to 'step out of her husband's diminishing shadow' thus allowing her to 'stand on the political stage as a player in her own right'.[430] Margaret's plots lay then with placing her son on the English throne, the former queen seemingly unconcerned about her husband's whereabouts following his capture by the Yorkists.[431] Instead, her attention lay with a successful marriage for her son which came with an alliance with ex-Yorkist Richard Neville, 16th Earl of Warwick by marrying her son to his youngest daughter, Anne, who later married Richard III and became queen of England.[432] Margaret was eventually defeated in the Battle of Tewkesbury on 4 May 1471, when her son Edward was killed and Margaret captured, the death of Henry VI – thought to be regicide – was also recorded as following this battle.[433]

Despite the pretence of Margaret acting transgressively on behalf of her husband and king, it is clear that her intentions lay with placing their son Edward on the throne of England over Henry VI, thus transgressing against him. This, therefore, concludes that the common denominator between these four she-wolves is their ability to transgress against the men they are meant to be subordinate to, whether that be their husbands, kings, or male family members.

Though the qualifying factors of being labelled a she-wolf have been identified, the presentation of Isabella in this manner is yet to be explored. Isabella was very quickly labelled by contemporaries as a 'betrayer of the king and kingdom'[434] following the beginning of her plot to usurp Edward II. However, despite the army rallied around Isabella

[429] *ibid.*, p.338.
[430] *ibid.*, p.339.
[431] *Wolffe, Henry VI*, p.330.
[432] *ibid.*, p.xiii.
[433] *ibid.*, p.327.
[434] *The Chronicle of Lanercost 1272 – 1346*, p.250.

being commanded by Roger Mortimer, she is praised for her army not shedding a single drop of blood and paying fair prices for all the supplies her forces needed while travelling through villages and towns.[435] The reasoning behind this peaceful approach – which was unlike most Plantagenet armies who would usually pillage their way across England – was the ideology that Isabella was there to rescue the English people from Edward II, and therefore she presented herself as a saviour rather than a usurper.[436]

The peaceful portrayal of Isabella does not stop here, Isabella's cunning plot to win the hearts of England by acting as mother to a nation continued once she had usurped the throne. In 1328 Isabella and Mortimer made the controversial decision to pursue peace with Scotland rather than continue the war that the Plantagenets had fought for centuries before her, this peace treaty was sealed with the marriage of Edward and Isabella's seven-year-old daughter Joan to David, the son of Robert the Bruce.[437] This treaty recognised Scotland's independence from England and named Bruce the rightful King of the Scots, much to the distain of Edward III, who despite not being old enough to rule for himself, was old enough to harbour an opinion.[438] Despite the pretence of being a knowledgeable military leader during the deposition crisis, Isabella's later rule of England as regent was one of lost battles and treaties, making her responsible for the independence of Scotland , which did not return to England until the death of Elizabeth I, who left England to the Scottish king – and her nephew, son of Mary Queen of Scots – James VI of Scotland and I of England.[439]

The demise of Isabella and Mortimer came when Edward III became old enough to not only rule England for himself, but also to understand the manipulative and self-serving actions of his mother and her lover, who had always acted with the aim of protecting themselves above

[435] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, p.294.
[436] *ibid.*
[437] *ibid.*, p.307.
[438] A. F. Murison, *King Robert the Bruce* (London: The Floating Press, 2015), p.128.
[439] P. Croft, *King James* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) p.49.

all else.[440] Edward III and his companion Montague led the campaign to rid England of its regents, Montague and his men sneaking into Nottingham Castle to meet Edward while Isabella and Mortimer slept and surrounding the pair before they knew what was happening.[441] Mortimer was 'stripped of his clothes and strung up from the gallows'[442] as if he were a thief, in complete disregard of his status and mocking his vanity.

Isabella ended up being hated by the English despite her earlier pretences, most likely due to the peace treaty she arranged with Scotland,[443] and so the people did not protest when she was kept under guard at Berkhamsted Castle following her capture.[444] Though she displayed characteristics synonymous with the modern concept of a she-wolf at this time, infamous for her masculine qualities and transgressions against her gender, it was her femininity which saved her from the same fate as Mortimer, for whom she grieved deeply.[445] Isabella's role as Edward III's mother, despite her using her son for her own political gain, kept her from being hung as a traitor, Castor believes Mortimer took the sole blame for their joint actions, Isabella being rendered to merely a pawn to his traitorous designs and being led off the course of her royal duty, therefore Edward kept his mother in the most luxurious house arrest at Windsor Castle, slowly restoring parts of her freedom.[446]

Isabella's masculine qualities of political selfishness, military prowess and cunning plot creation all lead to her being labelled as one of four of the most infamous she-wolves of history. Though her transgressions are clear, the undeniable fact is that people still viewed her as a female; she was unable to command an army without the aid of Mortimer and her femininity in motherhood saved her from a traitor's death. Therefore, despite being infamous

[440] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, p.313.
[441] *ibid.*, p.312.
[442] *ibid.*
[443] Murison, *King Robert the Bruce*), p.128.
[444] Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*, p.313.
[445] *ibid.*
[446] *ibid.*

for her transgression into masculinity, she was still viewed as feminine, even by the historians who frequently place people within the gender binary. It is evident that Isabella's transgressions labelled her a transgressive woman, dabbling in masculinity and kingship, whereas Edward II was often deemed as purely feminine, his redeeming qualities seemingly overlooked due to the presence of the unforgivable sin of sodomy.[447] Though both figures transgress, both within their genders and within sexuality due to their affairs, Isabella's story seemingly fares better regarding public opinion over time.

[447] Ormrod, 'The Sexualities of Edward II', *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives,* p.31.

Conclusion

To conclude this topic of gender transgressions and sexual deviancy in the reign of Edward II, it is vital to explore sexuality as a spectrum, not a binary. There are distinctions present between sex (the biological division between men and women), gender (the personal or societal expression of maleness and femaleness) and sexuality (the nature of one's sexual practice). However, these distinctions are also subject to societal impact, constructed by the world around them. Therefore, they evolve throughout history as society does, thus issue occurs as historical study applies modern concepts of sex, gender and sexuality onto historical figures rather than considering contemporary society.[448] Gender and sexuality can be linked to other social constructs, such as religion, nationality and class – the presentation of which exist outside of oppositional binaries such as male/female, masculine/feminine, straight/gay, there is instead infinite graduation of these topics over a spectrum.[449]

Regarding Edward II, we can conclude that the issues of sex and gender in his reign were not a tangent from 'real' political issues but instead these issues created an important discourse on wider political concerns, such as favouritism, tyranny and counsel, all problems which Edward's subordinate role – as seen in the way he prioritised Gaveston over the Ordinates – caused at court. Criticising Edward's deficiencies as a man leads to wider exploration of his role as a king, and the standard which he must achieve, plus the assumptions about his sexuality contributed to his gender transgressions. This research concluded that although there certainly was a societal link between sexual deviancy and the presentation of gender, the brand of the 'effeminising homosexual' was not the norm, unlike modern society where

[448] Ormrod, 'The Sexualities of Edward II', *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives,* p.25.
[449] *ibid.*

most associate ‘campness’ – the modern evolution of the effeminising – with homosexuality despite their existence separate from one another.

The link between sexuality and gender will always be subject to the gender binary, and whether one can – or feels the need to – differentiate topics and examples of gender and sexuality from this binary. Though the value of the binary in undeniable for quick association between action and consequence (for example, a known sodomite takes the subordinate position during sex, therefore plays the feminine role), the application of the binary hinders the ability to evaluate individual cases and view historical figures for who they are. This research saw that it is never as simple as to call someone completely transgressive: Isabella of France for example was certainly a transgressive figure and earned the title of she-wolf. However, there was more to her than the masculinity she presented, therefore, to label her as solely masculine as per the gender binary is an injustice.

Both of our main figures of study, Edward II of England and Isabella of France, proved that the existence of a spectrum is necessary, as neither fit appropriately on the scale provided by the gender binary. With Edward, the accusation of sodomy alone plus the rumour surrounding the anal rape narrative presented him as sexually transgressive, however he was not solely feminine in his actions – therefore he exists as a complex example of the nature between gender and sexuality. Evidently, each individual figure of history was equally as complex as the modern man, thus we may never truly understand the overall presentation of individuals, as when discussing subjects such as gender and sexuality in the Middle Ages, one is dealing with the reputations of individuals as we do not know what occurred behind closed doors.

Efforts to identify and label historical figures such as Edward II are both outdated and futile: outdated due to medieval attitudes to sex and gender being so different to our own and futile

because evidence will never exist to tell us exactly what acts figures such as Edward II engaged in, and how he viewed those acts. Classification, therefore, is invalid and thus exploration into individual cases of supposed gender transgressions and sexual deviancy are required in order to not generalise these subjects which have evolved vastly over centuries of social development.

In conclusion, gender transgressions and sexual deviancy are evident in the reign of Edward II, as they are in all aspects of society throughout history. Gender and sexuality are linked within human perception of topics however this too changes throughout time. The specific case of the reign of Edward II displayed some gender transgressions as a subject of sexual deviance, and the presence of both gender and sexual deviancy in transgressive individuals. However, the severity of such link is dependant entirely on each case. Thus, there is no perfect way to completely identify a historical figure in regard to their gender and sexuality, despite the modern desire to do so. The ability to classify historical figures based on their gender and sexuality is interesting to gain perspective and humanise these individuals, it also helps to gain understanding of emotion-based situations, as gender identity and perception alongside sexuality can often be driving forces for actions.

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